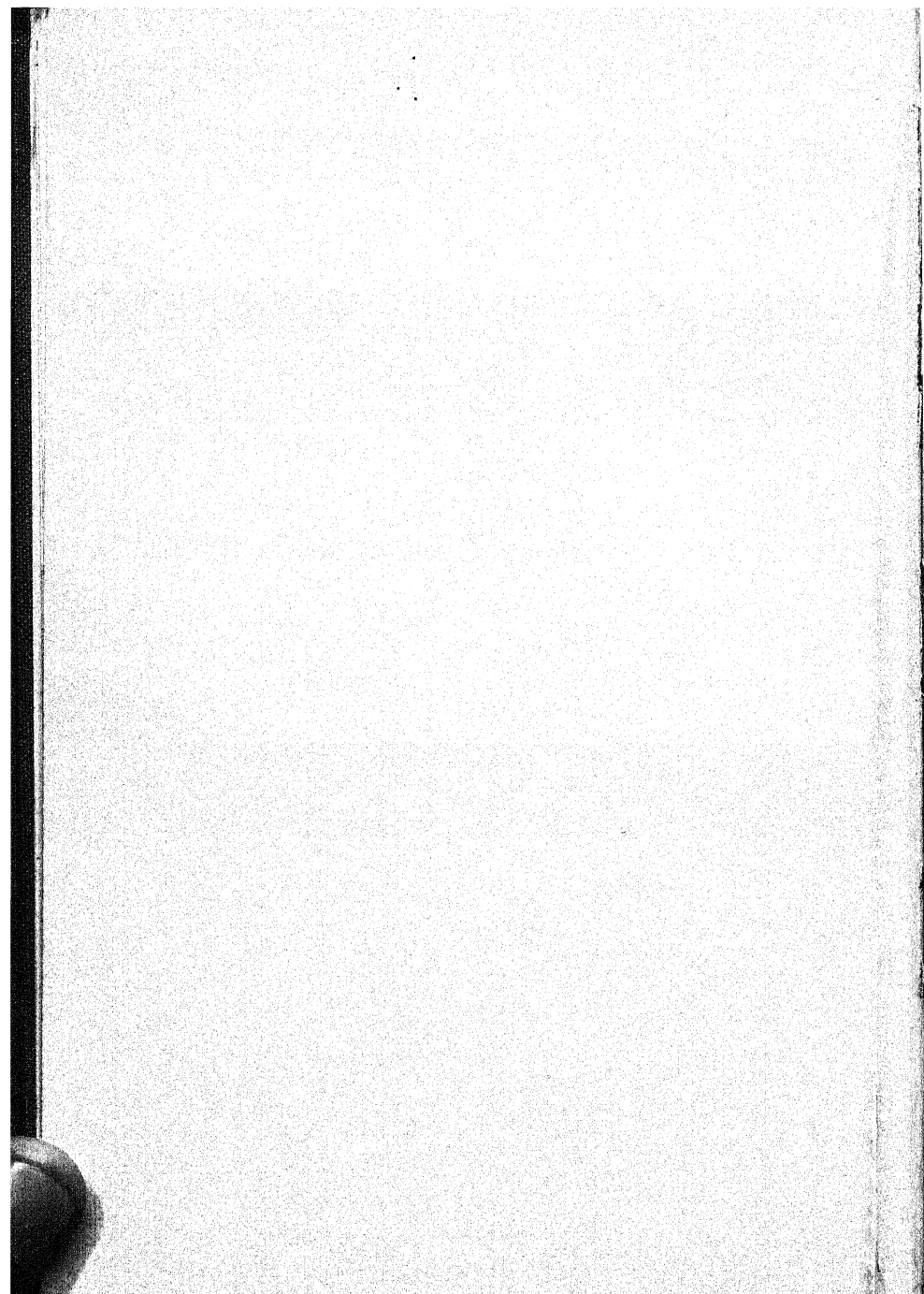


*WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?*







# *What Is A Christian?*

By

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New York

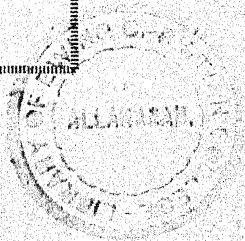
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## FOREWORD



SOME years ago the author prepared a series of short editorials which were published in *The Presbyterian Advance* under the general title, "What Is a Christian?" In response to a demand for these writings which could not be supplied through copies of the paper, the articles were republished as a small book, and continued demand called for additional printings until several thousand copies had been distributed. The little book now being again out of print, the author has followed the suggestion of the publishers and has revised the chapters, enlarging some of them, omitting one, and adding the five chapters grouped under the general heading, "Who Is This Son of Man?" But he has not departed from the original purpose, to send forth a small volume which may be easily read and become the basis for discussion of the important question which constitutes the title.

If some critic should arise from reading the following pages to say, "the book is a mere primer," such a judgment would be accepted by the author as high praise, for it would indicate that he had accomplished what he set out to do. His object has been to set forth in brief form and simple language, and for the use of the average Christian, some first lessons in Christianity as life.

*The motive* back of the chapters that follow has been to help the average Christian by removing some of the misconceptions which are common and which cause distress to earnest souls. There are those who are disturbed because they fall so far short of what they conceive to be an ideal Christian life. Indeed, young people are frequently met who express themselves as ready to abandon all effort to live the Christian life because they are so conscious of their shortcomings. Such persons will be helped and encouraged if they can grasp the truth that the Christian life, just because it is a life, involves struggle and growth. Others are distressed because they cannot ac-

cept some of the views held by fellow Christians, or because they are not conscious of the kind of personal experience of which others tell. These will be comforted and strengthened if they are brought to realize that in its essence Christianity is an inner attitude and purpose. Still others are perplexed by the obvious fact that some persons who do not profess to be Christians seem to be living on a higher moral plane than the average church member, and by the criticism which denounces as hypocrites those professing Christians who so evidently fall far short of "the perfect man." It is hoped that these pages will relieve some of that perplexity.

*The method* followed is not accidental but has been deliberately adopted. The author has endeavored to achieve two ends. The first is simplicity of statement. The second is the focusing of light from various angles upon a single essential truth. Phrases full of meaning to the minister have been avoided, because they are meaningless or misleading to the average reader. When used at all, terms

which are common to the pulpit and the religious press are explained in the ordinary language of "the man in the street," for whom the book is prepared. At least, such has been the author's aim, though it is difficult to avoid the unconscious use of phrases in common use by the preacher and religious journalist. Because of the purpose in view, there is much which may justly be criticised as reiteration. Indeed, the trained student may find the whole thought of the book concentrated in a single sentence, and he may count all the rest as mere padding; but the average reader is not a trained student, and for that reason the effort has been put forth deliberately to lead up to the one central truth by various avenues of approach.

*The concern* of these pages is with Christianity as life, with what may be called the "vital principle" of our religion. Their concern is not with doctrine, nor tradition, nor even, except incidentally, with the various manifestations of the vital principle as it expresses itself in human affairs. The Christian

life is not confined to any single intellectual or practical or even moral expression. It cannot be, just because it is primarily a life, and life always develops and manifests itself differently in proportion to its development. Our concern, however, is not with the manifestations except so far as they may help us to determine whether the life itself is present. Our purpose, rather, is to help men answer the question, "Am I a Christian?" It is to help them see that to be a real Christian means that one has actually begun to live a certain kind of life, which life, like all life, begins as a mere germ, so to speak, and must develop—"first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear."

*To describe, not to explain*, is what is attempted in these chapters. The effort to explain belongs to theology, though even theology has more than its hands full when it undertakes to explain *life*, and science and philosophy are equally helpless. But it is possible to describe what we cannot explain, and to some extent it is possible to describe life.

It is certainly possible to distinguish between one kind or type of life and another—between vegetable and animal life, for instance, or between physical and mental life. Our effort, therefore, is merely to point out as definitely as possible the distinction between the individual life that is Christian and the individual life that is not Christian. Of course, as individuals associate themselves together we at once have a social life that is Christian, or not Christian, or more or less Christian; but the range of this book is not intended to cover the social aspects of the Christian life, but only its characteristics as pertaining to the individual.

If in any measure these pages help to remove misconceptions, to hearten Christians, to give a more spiritual content to the term "faith" and, above all, to bring some into a closer relationship with Him who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" the writer will feel that he has received abundant reward.

J. E. C.

*Nashville, Tenn.*



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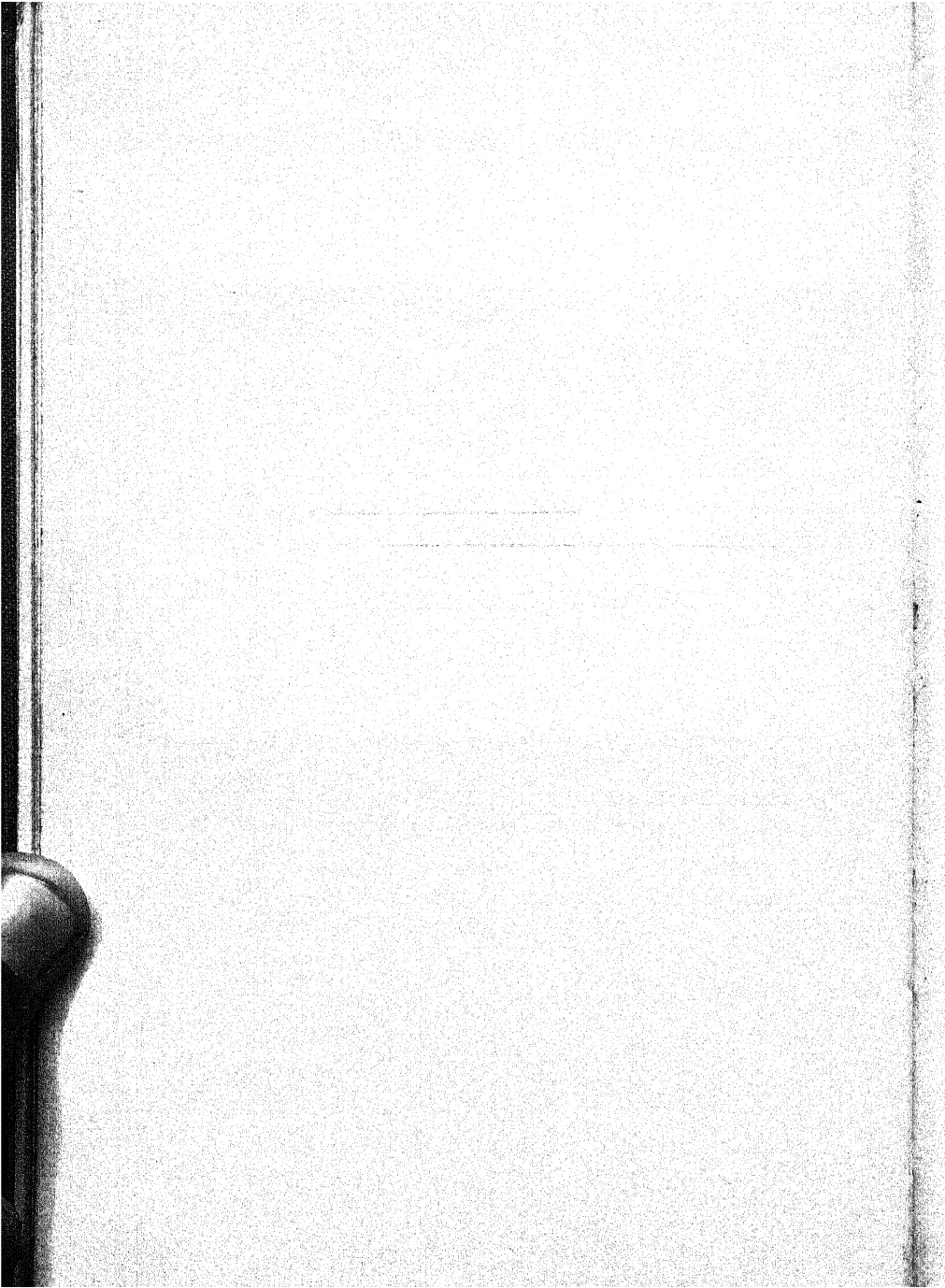
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I

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?



# I

## A QUESTION OF LIFE ATTITUDE

HE careful and unbiased study of the teaching of the New Testament will make it apparent at once that when we face the question, "What Is a Christian?" we are facing a question that relates to an attitude or quality of life. The answer to the question is not to be found in any external relationship. One's acceptance of a certain group of religious beliefs, his adherence to one form of religion instead of another, his conformity to particular rites and ceremonies, even his membership in an organization classified as Christian—no one of these relationships or all of them together can be relied upon to determine whether that person is a Christian. As Paul said long ago of the peculiar rite required of Jews, so we might say of all the rites and forms and ceremonies required today: "Neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature."

A college student came with the question, "Why, when the people are already Christians,

is it necessary to send missionaries to South America?" The answer was: "Because most of them are believed to be merely nominal Christians." College man though he was, the word "nominal" did not convey a clear picture to his mind and he asked its meaning. Of course, he was told that it meant, "in name only." Ours is called a Christian nation because the dominant religion is the Christian religion, as distinguished from Mohammedanism, Buddhism, or some other religious faith and form; but many, if not most, of our citizens are Christians in name only. In attempting to answer the question, What Is a Christian? we are not to think of the persons who are Christians in name only. Rather, our question grows out of the conviction that there are real Christians, as well as merely nominal Christians, and that, in his inner being, the real Christian is sufficiently different from the person who is not a Christian to make it possible so to describe and define him that this difference will be apparent.

In the conversation just mentioned the fact was brought out that on the whole the Christianity of South America gives evidence of being merely an outward, formal affair. When the Spaniards discovered and settled that land,

they baptised natives by the thousands and counted every person so baptised as a Christian. Ever since most of the professed Christians of South America seem to have held to the view that to accept as true the teachings of the church and to conform to its outward requirements is what makes one a Christian. To be sure, some, or many, may be Christians in the inner life and spirit and purpose, Christians in fact as well as in outward form. Only God can judge the individual case. The distinction is made, however, because it is possible for one to be a Christian in an outward, formal sense without differing in his inner life and spirit from persons who do not even claim to be Christians.

It is probably a fair statement that every spiritual reality takes form in a body or bodies. For instance, all are familiar with a reality commonly called the "spirit of democracy." It is the inner conviction that the right or best kind of government is government by all the people. Now, that democratic spirit, or ideal, takes form as a republic, like ours. It is easy to realize that one might conform outwardly to our form of government and yet be at heart a monarchist, plutocrat, socialist, or something else. So one may conform to outward, formal

Christianity without being a Christian at heart.

Christianity is in its essence a way of life, characterized in the New Testament as "the way."

It takes form in numerous ways, chiefly two: First, as a "body of truth" generally believed—its theological form; secondly, as an organized body of persons—its institutional form. The Apostles' Creed, for instance, puts in verbal form what Christians generally believe; but one may accept the statements of the creed as being true and yet not even try to shape his life in accordance with that truth. So one may join the church and comply with its outward requirements without being a Christian in spirit. Our question applies neither to the merely nominal Christians nor to the merely formal Christians. Rather we seek to discover what the real Christian actually is in his inner being and spirit.

In its essence, Christianity is not a name nor a form, but a life. That is the definite teaching of Scripture. The Christian is one "born again," "born of the Spirit." "He that hath the Son hath life." Jesus Himself said that He had come into the world that men "might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." This is the very center of New Testament teaching. Moreover, human experience

Chry. Smith  
1902-1903



shows that there is certainly a reality known among men as "the Christian life." It manifests itself in various ways, but our concern in what follows is only incidentally with those manifestations. Rather we seek to discover what that Christian life itself is like. At bottom, all religion is a matter of one's attitude toward God. A man's mere belief about God does not make him a religious man—"the devils also believe and tremble"—and are devils still. What makes a man "religious" is that (by whatever process) he comes to assume a certain attitude toward God. So, what makes a man a Christian in the vital sense, in his own inner being, is that he comes to assume a certain life-attitude toward God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Our business is to try to discover what is that Christian attitude.

From what precedes it is evident that our concern is with a fact, not with the explanation of a fact. That common experience of men, that attitude toward God known as the Christian life, is a fact. What we call theology is an attempt to explain that fact. It undertakes to tell us what God is, what man is, how man came to sustain a wrong attitude toward God, how he is brought into the right, or Christian, attitude, and much more. It is said that the-

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ology "attempts," that it "undertakes," because there are numerous theologies, numerous attempted explanations, and all cannot be right. However, the fact with which theology deals remains the same, whether one's theology is good, bad or indifferent, whether it explains or only befuddles. Experience comes first; then explanation. The first theology must have been the first opinion ever expressed in the effort to explain an experience of God. That opinion may have been correct or sadly in error, but the success or failure of any attempted explanation cannot change in the slightest degree the reality of an experience. Millions have suffered the effects of a physical disease called malaria. Once it was explained as due to the miasma of swamps or "night air." Now it is generally believed to be due to germs carried by mosquitoes. But the experience remains the same, though the explanation has changed. Men who experience malaria today shiver and shake with chills and burn with fever just as men did in Rome centuries ago before anyone ever dreamed of the pernicious activity of the mosquito. Explanations may differ, but a given experience remains the same and can be described without regard to the explanation.

In attempting to answer the question, What Is a Christian? the purpose of these chapters is merely to describe. It is not to explain. If we were to use a word familiar to the chemical or biological laboratory, it might be said that the purpose is to "isolate" the Christian. That is, we seek to set him off by himself so that he may be clearly distinguished from other and similar beings or entities. If we were to use the term familiar to engineers, it could be said that we are seeking to "locate" the Christian. That is, we seek to discover his exact position with reference to all that is about him. Or, to employ a word used by philosophers as well as surveyors, we might say that we seek to "orient" the Christian. That is, we hope to help him "get his bearings." With such a purpose in view, familiar theological terms will be deliberately avoided, except for purposes of illustration. The effort is to describe the Christian attitude so simply that it may be distinguished from other life attitudes even by those who have no conscious Christian experience.

## II

### A QUESTION OF LIFE'S RULING PURPOSE

**H**AVING clearly in mind the thought that our purpose is to discover what is that individual attitude which is properly called Christian, it may be well at the beginning to set down a definition to serve as a kind of working hypothesis. Really, in his own thinking, the writer built his definition out of the considerations which will be set forth later; yet it may be helpful to others to have at least a tentative definition as a starting point.

The truth is that there can be no more comprehensive definition of a Christian than the four words which naturally form on the lips as one hears the question, What is a Christian? Promptly the reply comes: "A disciple of Christ." The whole truth is in that statement, yet it is probable that many who use the words do not have the whole truth in mind, because they do not realize what is involved in the word "disciple."

What is a disciple? Why, of course, he is a learner, a pupil; but do we usually stop to think that this means that he is *only* a learner, *only* a pupil? He is not learned; he is just *learning*. He is not fully developed; he is just *developing*. But something more is true: The object of the disciple, the pupil, is to receive what the teacher has to give, to become what the teacher would have him become; and all of this is involved in Christian discipleship. The object of it all is to be what Christ would have the pupil be. With the familiar but wonderfully comprehensive definition as a basis, therefore, another is suggested. Though longer, it is really simpler, because it indicates what is meant by the word disciple. This is it:

*A Christian is one whose ruling purpose in life is to become conformed, not only outwardly in conduct but inwardly in mind and spirit, to the divine ideal, as manifested in Jesus Christ.*

Let it be kept clearly in mind as we proceed that we are not dealing with the *how*, but only with the *what* of the Christian life. Our present concern is not with the question *how* one becomes a Christian, *how* he comes to have such a ruling purpose. Our present purpose is merely to locate the Christian, to help him find



himself, to uncover characteristics of his inner life, so that others may see that it is a mistake to base judgment upon mere conduct alone. And let us remember, too, that we are not now concerned with what a Christian may or *ought to be*. Whatever he is, he certainly ought to be a bigger and better Christian than he is today; but our present business is solely to determine what he *is*. With these considerations in mind, let us examine our definition with some care, to be sure that we understand what is involved.

In the first place, observe that the definition does not refer to a *constant* purpose, but to a *ruling* purpose. In fact, so far as we know men, we know of no Christian who would claim that he was absolutely true to a single purpose at every moment of his Christian life; yet, though he may be now and again swayed by other motives, the true Christian, like the needle to the pole, will always swing back to this one purpose as the one which rules his life. At times, life will doubtless be lived with some other object in view; but we conceive the true Christian to be one whose *life as a whole*, from the moment he becomes a Christian, will be swayed by this one dominant purpose.

In the second place, keep ever in mind the fact that the purpose of the true Christian is



to be conformed to a divine ideal—not to any human standard, however high and good; not to the requirements of any human organization or institution, however near perfection it may be; but to an ideal never yet fully attained by any human being, though an ideal made manifest in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, the God-man. It is this desire and purpose to attain to a divine ideal which distinguishes all truly religious motive from other motives which actuate men, and this desire and purpose are *Christian* whenever Jesus Christ is recognized as the manifestation of that divine ideal to which men aspire. In still simpler terms, the true Christian is one who, however he started, has as his main purpose in life to become like Jesus Christ.

a good  
summary.

Further, it appears that our definition applies not to a person who has "arrived," but to one who is in process of becoming. This distinction is of the utmost importance, for it is a common fallacy to think of a Christian as one who has attained, or who claims to have attained, to certain heights of goodness. Who has not noticed, for instance, how schoolboys are apt to treat one of their number who has become a professed follower of Christ—as if he had laid claim to belonging to a higher caste.

The fact is, however, at least so far as our definition goes, that to say that a person is a Christian affirms nothing at all concerning his place among his fellows as measured by the moral scale; it affirms merely that he is one who has started on a great adventure, seeking a "pearl of great price"—the likeness of Jesus Christ. Even Paul, remarkable Christian that he was, wrote after he had been years on the way: "Not that I have already obtained. . . . I count not myself yet to have laid hold; but one thing I do. . . . I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." That's what made him a Christian—not his attainments, but his purpose to attain the ideal.

But there is in our definition a third great truth frequently overlooked. We are often confronted with the suggestive question, "What would Jesus do?" But there is a much more important question. It is this: What *was* Jesus? The Christian is not one whose purpose is merely to imitate the conduct of Jesus, but one who seeks to be like Him in spirit and do what He did for the same reasons which actuated the Master Himself. That is, the true Christian seeks not merely to imitate the conduct of Jesus, but to become like Jesus in

mind and spirit. And, really, it is easier to be Christ-like in conduct than to be Christ-like in spirit. It is easier never to appear selfish than it is actually to have no selfish will and desire; easier to control the manifestations of hatred than to overcome all hatred and be dominated by the spirit of love; easier to speak the word of forgiveness than to banish every unforgiving thought. *XX*

The Christian is one who seeks not merely to do what Jesus did or would do, but to be what Jesus was, and this we believe to be the very highest and holiest purpose which can actuate a man. Indeed, just to do what Jesus did, even to imitate exactly His conduct when He was among men, and count this outward conformity as essential Christianity, would be to miss the mark altogether. There's a world of difference between Jesus' day and our day and He Himself said that His disciples should do "greater works." Conditions constantly change and, therefore, the manifestations of any given spirit must change to suit new conditions; but that which is essential to the Christian is the purpose to become like Christ in spirit, whether life is spent in the first century or in the twentieth. *I think.*

### III

#### THE CHRISTIAN AND THE CHURCH MEMBER

**T**HE church member ought to be a Christian and the Christian ought to be a member of the church. The fact is, however, that "Christian" and "church member" are not synonymous terms, and much confusion and misunderstanding and unjust criticism arise out of the failure to discern this truth. If we are to make progress in determining the nature of a Christian, we will be relieved of a great handicap provided it is first made clear that to become a member of the church does not make one a Christian, except in a nominal and very superficial sense.

Probably there are very few people who join a church from some ulterior motive. Most church members are doubtless identified with the church either because they are convinced that church membership is a plain Christian duty or because they think that in some unknown manner the church will be a help to the

development of that higher nature of which they are vaguely conscious. Yet it must be admitted that, in a time like this, when the church is highly respectable and church membership highly "proper," self-seeking persons may become church members solely because of "an eye to business."

The tale is told of three brothers, partners in the butcher business, who moved into a certain town and at once became church members—one a Baptist, one a Methodist and one a Presbyterian. When asked how it happened that they were in different churches, one naïvely (or, perhaps, jokingly) replied, "It's good for the business." Whether that story is true or not, it is altogether possible for persons to be church members "for revenue only," or for social advantage, or for any one of a thousand reasons other than because church membership is an expression of the Christian purpose of life. Yet it is a common thing for people outside of the church to form an opinion of the Christian from some experiences with a church member, though the church member may not be a true Christian at all.

While it is probable that there are very few such hypocrites in the church—just enough to give eloquent testimony to the real value of the

*Illus.*

genuine Christian life—yet it can hardly be doubted that our churches contain many members who, sincerely though ignorantly, think that to be a church member is equivalent to being a Christian, and such deceived persons need to have their eyes opened to the truth.

To be a Christian is not the same as to accept the creed or submit to the rites or conform to the practices of any church. It is not meant to suggest that these normal and customary relations to the church are unimportant. Rather, they are very important; yet they are not of the essence of the Christian life. One may accept in every detail the most perfect creed—if he can find it, one may be as punctilious as the Pharisees of old in the observance of ceremonial law and ecclesiastical custom, and yet, to the Master's eye, be only what those Pharisees were, "whited sepulchres, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men's bones." This is because the essence of Christianity is in life. Fundamentally, to be a Christian is not a matter of the intellect or of manners or of association, but of the inner spirit and purpose which give meaning and direction to the whole of life. To have one's name on the roll of the church is not a sure test of one's standing as a Christian.

On the other hand, church membership is not to be reserved for those who give unmistakable and unvarying evidence of their Christian character. If it were, few indeed would be the number of church members. The church should, of course, deny membership to any who openly deny the Christian purpose and, though it may make mistakes, the church may wisely reject as members any persons who appear deliberately and persistently to follow courses which are obviously at variance with that Christian purpose; yet the church was never meant to be an aggregation of perfect or full-grown Christians. It is merely the organization of men, women and children who, whatever their stage of development, are *disciples*, learners, in the school of Christ. He whose ruling purpose in life is to become like Christ has a right in the church, even though he has made but little progress toward the realization of his purpose, and it is the business and mission of the church to help him on his way and to labor for the formation of the same purpose in those who have it not.

It is a mistake, therefore, to judge the church as if it were, or pretended to be, made up of persons exceptionally good. It makes no such pretension. It was never intended to be an



exclusive conservatory for the preservation and exhibition of highly developed and beautifully flowering spiritual plants. On the contrary, it is designed to be a workshop, its force being made up of all sorts and kinds of persons of all grades of development and efficiency, but held together by a common purpose and growing steadily toward the divine ideal as they labor together, each for the other and all for those without. When one is identified with this working force the presumption is that he is a Christian; but the proof of his discipleship lies not in his church membership, but in his possession of that ruling purpose which prompts men to serve and labor together for the common good.

It has just been said that the church is designed to be a workshop. While that is true, it is not the whole truth. Some members of the church, and many others who should be in the church, are too young to be reckoned as workmen, or at any rate as efficient workmen, in the great task of building the kingdom of God—not necessarily too young in the years of human life, but too young in the Christian life. They need to be nurtured and taught and developed. Hence the church must be also a nursery and a school for the purpose of devel-



oping each infant Christian into a workman "that needeth not to be ashamed." Fortunately, the churches are at least beginning to realize that it is their business to teach and train the children in the human sense of the word, but, unfortunately, few seem to have grasped the truth that persons who are humanly mature may be but babes in the spiritual life.

When a fullgrown man becomes converted and joins the church is it not the rule to think of him as one who ought at once to become active in Christian service and manifest the graces of a mature Christian? If he "falls from grace" are we not prone to condemn? Do we treat him as we would treat the toddler in the home who, just learning to walk, falls and hurts himself? Do we think of him as a child? Yet that is just what he is with respect to the Christian life, and it is ridiculous to act on the assumption that a child should manifest the strength and stability, the wisdom and culture of a mature man. We sorely need to meditate upon Paul's admonition to the Galatians: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted." Doubtless

there are hypocrites in the churches, but it is inexcusable to jump to the conclusion that all or most of the inconsistent and inactive church members are hypocrites. The chances are that they are Christian at heart, but they are so young or so undeveloped that they manifest little of Christian vigor and frequently fall by the way. What such persons need above everything else is the counsel and help of those who are older in the faith. More church members would be better Christians if all of us could see more clearly the truth that the primary business of the church is the development of that spiritual life which is the gift of God, so that it may manifest itself in Christ-like service.

#### IV

### THE CHRISTIAN VERSUS THE MORALIST

**P**ROBABLY no more perplexing problem is presented to the young Christian than when, perhaps while engaged in the effort to persuade some one else to start the Christian life, he is confronted by an argument like this: "I don't see why I should be a Christian. There's Mr. A. He's not a Christian, yet everybody says he's one of the best men in town—a good deal better than many of your Christians. He wouldn't do the mean things that some of these church people do."

Now, the chances are in every such case that when the objector says "Christian" he means "church member." It is a fact that Mr. A. is not a church member; but it is by no means so certain that he is not a Christian. Indeed, the writer has known several such persons as Mr. A., and in nearly every case it was found that the person who was held up as a moral exemplar was really a sincere Christian man, though

for some reason failing in the plain duty to make a public affirmation of his allegiance. Often such persons have such an exalted notion of the meaning of church membership that they feel themselves wholly unworthy to belong to an organization of Christians, and often they have such a dread of falling short of any profession they might make that they prefer to make no profession at all; but they are Christians nevertheless.

However, it is true that there are men—there have been such men in all ages—who are of high moral character and live as shining examples among their fellows, and yet deny the Christian purpose. Few, if any such, have anything but the highest admiration, even reverence, for Jesus of Nazareth, yet they would not go so far as to say that the ruling purpose of their lives is to become like Him—though perhaps it is, after all. These are our “moralists.” They have a high sense of honor and of duty, a keen perception of what is generally agreed to be right and honorable, and it is their pride so to live in conformity to prevailing moral standards that no man can say they have fallen short of these standards. (Their god, so to speak, is the moral standard of the community in which they

live; their ruling purpose is to live in conformity to that standard.)

In all candor we should go a step farther. It is very commonly a fact that, judged by these moral standards, such a "moralist" actually is a better man, a more nearly perfect man, than the average professed Christian of his town. Usually it is not difficult to find a reason for this. In most cases this highly moral man had a much better start than the average Christian as judged by the moral scale. In most cases, too, the moralist is a mature man, well established in his mode of life, while the average Christian is much younger in years and experience. Besides, the exceptional moral man may have enjoyed the advantages of a peculiarly helpful moral environment, while the average Christian grew up in just an average environment. Such things are all worthy of consideration, yet they do not hint at the radical difference between the mere moralist and the true Christian. Here is that difference:

The moralist is a man who has "arrived"—arrived at the goal of a human standard. The Christian is one who is merely on the way; but he is on the way toward a divine ideal. The purpose of the mere moralist is to live out his

*Diff. between  
human & Christian  
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life on the plane of his achievement, but the purpose of the Christian is not merely to attain to and live by a human standard, but to lift that standard higher and higher, by "reaching forth" toward the full-grown man, "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

This is not to accuse the moral man of lacking altogether the same high purpose for, as already intimated, it is not improbable that he is really actuated by a purpose he does not recognize; but taking him at his word, the difference between the mere moralist and the true Christian is that the former is content with his attainments while the latter can never be content with anything less than likeness to Jesus Christ, who is the shining forth of God's glory and "the express image of his person."

What we commonly fail to see is that our mere moralist is but a creature of his environment, and environment varies greatly. The consequence is that one who may be accounted a veritable moral paragon in the town where he now lives would be looked upon as a social outcast if he should move into one of our finest Christian communities. In Turkey, even in Utah, one may be a polygamist and yet be considered a highly moral man. Indeed, there are parts of the world where the murderer of chil-

dren may still move in the "best society." In short, moral standards differ in different parts of the earth. They have also been changing steadily as the years have passed, and always for the better. Lewdness once openly encouraged in royal courts is today scarcely tolerated in our vilest slums. Drunkenness—why the first record of Presbyterian official church action against intemperance of which we have any knowledge was a timid resolution admonishing Presbyterian ministers not "to drink *too much on public occasions.*" Clearly a minister of that day—only about 125 years ago—could have lived up to that standard most faithfully and yet he would have been far down the scale as measured by the standard of today with respect to temperance. Is it clear what such an illustration means? It means that if we were to judge the Christianity of the ministers of that day by the moral standard of today we would have to conclude that they were not Christians at all. Yet proof that most of them were Christians is found in the fact that they were not content with the moral standard of their times but, prompted by the purpose to attain to a divine ideal, their vision became clearer and clearer and they and their successors in the Christian ministry took step



after step toward abstinence and prohibition until today drunkenness is rarely seen and the whole traffic in intoxicants is under the ban.

Surely it is most unwise, if not essentially unjust and unChristlike, to condemn the moral man and his morality in the manner that even some Christian ministers have been known to do. So far as he goes, the moral man is clearly worthy of commendation, but also of commiseration, for he is missing something and does not know it. He is a man who has fallen into "the peril of the lesser good." Go read again the story of the rich young ruler to discover the Christ attitude toward the moral man and also the contrast between the mere moralist and the Christian. That rich young man was in every way attractive. He had kept the law. He lived a moral life. He met every requirement of the moral standard of his time and community, yet he was conscious of a disturbing lack. He was a lovable fellow, and looking on him, Jesus loved him. Nor did Jesus condemn the young man's life. Rather, His words imply approval; but Jesus saw that, in his devotion to things that were good, the young ruler was missing the best, so he said: "If thou wouldst be perfect" let everything else go "and come, follow me." The sad thing



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about the story is that the young man's love of riches kept him from making the Christian purpose the ruling purpose of his life. Now, as then, a man may be reckoned by "good society" as a moral man though he uses his possessions for himself alone; but so to live is to manifest the opposite of the Christian spirit.

To be a Christian, then, is not the same as to live in conformity to the moral standards of any place or time, though, of course, the true Christian spirit always prompts towards the purest morality, as the term "morality" is understood in the time and place where one lives. It is impossible to say that one is a Christian because he lives as a moral man. It is equally impossible to determine that he is not a Christian because he does not conform in all respects to what we consider the proper moral standard. The Christian may or may not have attained to what we consider the true moral standard, but this much is certain about him: He knows that he has not attained to what is for him the ideal of spirit and conduct, but down in his heart is this ruling purpose: "I press on, if so be that I may lay hold on that for which also I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus."

V

# THE CHRISTIAN VERSUS THE NOT CHRISTIAN

WHEN stripped of all familiar theological and religious terminology, the really fundamental difference between the Christian and the man who is not a Christian may be made clear by the following simple proposition:

The dominating purpose of the Christian is *to do God's will*.

The dominating purpose of the Not Christian is *to do as he pleases*.

Recall the fact that in this study we are not attempting to decide how some men come to have one dominating purpose and some another. Our single aim is to make clear, in untheological terms, the fundamental difference between the Christian and the Not Christian; and this difference will be found to be at heart a difference of will—a self-centered will versus a surrendered will. Putting the difference in other words:

The Christian wills to do God's will.

The Not Christian wills to do his own will.

To make such statements is not to imply that the person who is not a Christian necessarily leads a life of great sinfulness. He may

not. Indeed, it would seem to be theoretically possible for a man, under this analysis, to be classified as a Not Christian and yet to live a life in harmony with the will of God. That is, it might happen that a man's own purpose accords perfectly with God's will and yet that man continues to occupy the attitude of total disregard of the will of God. The true Christian, on the other hand, though he may fall far short of the ideal, is one who sincerely subordinates his own will to the will of God, so far as the divine will is known and understood.

The objection may be raised that the Not Christian does not really do his own will: that he is, though unconsciously, the slave of other spiritual forces which strive against the will of God; and this may be true. Man is very proud of saying, "I am my own master," but it is very doubtful whether he ever really is his own master. "Know ye not," says Paul, "that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" It is not at all impossible that the

man who boasts of following the bent of his own will is really a slave of the "Zeitgeist," the spirit and temper of his times and associates; yet, whether he is fooling himself or not, the fact remains that he thinks he is doing as he pleases and that he *means* to do his own will and not the will of anyone else on earth or in heaven. It is this which distinguishes him from the Christian for, however often he may fail, the Christian really means to do the will of God. It is easy to see that between these two there is a radical difference of spirit and purpose.

Once more the reader needs to be cautioned to remember that we are considering only the "ruling purpose" of life. It is not meant to affirm that the Christian actually *does* the will of God throughout his life, that all of his actions, decisions and undertakings are the result of divine control. Indeed, at this point the Christian faces a very grave danger of self-deception. It is as easy for him to fool himself as for the man who prides himself upon his absolute independence of will, and when a Christian is thus self-deceived he becomes what we call a fanatic. Thinking that he is God-guided and Spirit-prompted, he does all sorts of things which are obviously out of accord with

the will of God as that will is revealed in Scripture and in the life of Christ. But the true Christian rarely makes this mistake. He is ever aware of the fact that he falls far short of God's righteous and holy will. Nevertheless, his ruling purpose is that his whole life shall be God-controlled, and with this desire uppermost he looks up into the face of his Heavenly Father and says, "I surrender all. Take me, teach me, guide me, strengthen me, that I may walk in the footsteps of Him who said at the beginning of His life, 'I came to do thy will,' and at its close, 'Not my will but thine be done.'"

It is at this point that we are able to see why the church and the Bible mean so much to the Christian and have so little value in the eye of the Not Christian. The Bible and the church are means through which the will of God is made known to men and men are encouraged to understand and do as the heavenly Father would have them do. It is rather safe to assert that as a rule those persons who care nothing for the church and the Bible also care little or nothing about discovering the will of God for their lives. The man who proposes to do as he pleases is sure to be indifferent to what would please God. But the Christian, with the sin-

cere desire to know and do God's will, finds the path made increasingly plain as he attends upon the ministry of the church and comes to master the messages of God's revealed word. This is especially true when he studies faithfully the life of Jesus the Christ and comes to catch the spirit which dominated that unique life.

It is as we think of Jesus Christ that it becomes apparent that necessarily the Christian is one who puts himself under divine control and seeks to know and do God's will. The Christian's ultimate goal is to become like Christ, and what made the Man of Galilee absolutely unique among all who ever trod the earth was that, at every turn of the way, at every crisis of life, however severe the temptation and however great the struggle, He emerged victorious and *actually did* what He Himself said He came from heaven to do—"the will of my Father which is in heaven." In Jesus was God's character, God's will, God's way manifested unto men. It must be, therefore, that it is by the kind of life He lived, a life surrendered to the will of the Father, that we both learn that divine will and receive the power to live in ever-increasing harmony with the will of God. In the early days, as indicated

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in the New Testament, Christianity was described in simple terms as "the Way," a term that suggests at once a life of progress toward a definite goal. That's just what it is—"the Jesus Way," as it is described to this day by some of the natives of India. It is the way toward the goal which Jesus set—"that they also may be one in us"—and the life attitude essential to walking the way and gaining the goal is that of surrender to the will of God. Hence the difference between the Christian and the Not Christian may be thus stated:


The Not Christian wills to go his own way.

The Christian wills to go the Jesus way.



## VI

### NOT FULL-GROWN BUT GROWING

NE invariable characteristic of the Christian is immaturity. All Christians have actually begun to live a new life, a life which is evidenced by the consciousness of new purpose, by a sense of obligation to a divine Father, as the physical life is evidenced by breath and heart-beat. Like the children in a large family, however, Christians differ greatly among themselves. Some are younger, weaker, less perfectly developed than others. Yet, while differing greatly, all have this in common: They are still immature; they have not yet attained.

We are accustomed to make a rather sharp distinction by classifying human beings as either children or men; but, as a matter of fact, does a human being ever reach maturity in this life except with respect to physical development? We become men in physical stature, but how like children most of us remain in all other respects! And when, after years, the most highly developed seem about to outgrow



their childhood, they start backward again because of the influence of a worn-out body. We must always make allowances for the inherent childishness of the race. In like manner, in any study of the Christian we must make allowance for his persistent immaturity. We are sure to misunderstand, sure to misjudge, unless we keep ever in mind the truth that the Christian, young or old, weak or strong, is still but a child, undergoing a process of development.

No thought is set forth more clearly and none is more emphasized in Scripture than the thought that the Christian is a child and that he is expected to grow. Paul wrote to the Corinthians as to "babes in Christ," babes who were still unable to assimilate more substantial food than milk, and he taught the Ephesians that the purpose of the whole organization of the church—apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers—was that "we may no longer be children . . . but . . . grow up in all things into him who is the head, even Christ." Everywhere this truth stands out in the Bible and it is set forth in the familiar doctrine of the churches known as "growth in grace." Hence, as we try to determine just what a Christian is, we may be sure that our concern is not with "a fixed object," so to

speaking, but with a moving object; not with a person whose character is settled and no longer subject to change, but with a person who is constantly changing because steadily developing toward the ideal life. It may be truly said that the Christian is the subject of an evolutionary process, and where there is no such process of change and growth there is no Christian. There is no such thing as a static Christian.

While growth is the law of Christian living, every Christian begins as a "babe in Christ." This is the practical meaning of a church doctrine which is often thought of as unusually mystical and mysterious—the doctrine of "regeneration." Sometimes young Christians are sorely distressed because of inability to answer the question which they are constantly asking themselves: "Have I really been regenerated?" Well, have you reason to believe that you are *living*? Then you certainly were born. Regeneration means simply rebirth, a new birth, a birth from above; that is, the beginning of a spiritual life. For practical purposes it matters little when or how or under what conditions that life had its beginning; the practical question is, Are we living? It is possible that one becomes conscious of the new life at the very moment of its beginning. Another

may have been living some time before being conscious of the fact, just as the human infant probably lives for months before being self-conscious. But however early or late one becomes conscious of the Christian spirit and purpose dominating his life, he certainly begins that new life as an infant; he does not leap into it full grown and fully equipped for its adventures and its struggles. Let us get this truth clearly: One may be a Christian though as weak and helpless as a new born babe.

Not only does each Christian begin as a babe, but all growth is slow, and the higher the form of life the longer drawn out are the processes of development. The toadstool may spring to maturity in a night, but it is days before the kitten so much as gets its eyes open, months before a baby can walk, years before the child reaches the stature and strength of manhood, decades before the mental powers are so developed that we can speak of the man as a person of mature judgment. It is to be expected, therefore, that the development of character and spirit toward likeness to the divine ideal will be, like all other evolutionary processes, slow, gradual, perhaps imperceptible, except as viewed after long intervals of time. It is by no sudden leap that the Christian

comes into possession of spiritual strength and equipment; it is by the slow process of growth. Young Christians are sometimes led to expect that upon starting the Christian life they will at once be clothed with almost irresistible spiritual power, but, normally at least, this does not occur, and all of us should attend to the warning: "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

*"We have not wings, we cannot soar;  
But we have feet to scale and climb  
By slow degrees, by more and more,  
The cloudy summits of our time.*

*"The heights by great men reached and kept  
Were not attained by sudden flight,  
But they, while their companions slept,  
Were toiling upward through the night."*

There is a third truth with respect to Christian development which is of importance. It is that growth is influenced greatly by environment. Just as soil and climate, sunshine and moisture, affect the growth of a plant, so what we call the spiritual surroundings affect the development of a Christian. Of course, it is incumbent upon the Christian to seek the best possible environment—that is the reason why he should join the church, associate with more

mature Christians, cultivate the habits of prayer and Bible study and give expression to the life that is in him by sacrificing service. But it should not be forgotten that his environment is not wholly within his control. Some have tremendous advantages of which others are wholly deprived. One, for instance, began the Christian life in infancy and grew up in the finest type of Christian home and the truest kind of Christian church; but another did not become a Christian until much later in life, after having been for years the slave of selfish, "carnal," habits, and has been forced to live ever since where church privileges were limited and in the midst of associates whose influence is altogether against Christian development. All such circumstances should be taken into consideration as we seek to answer our question, What is a Christian?

Among the important truths that the newer psychological studies are helping all to see is the truth that most men are "but children of a larger growth"—bigger in stature, but children still. Much has been said about the army tests which showed that the great majority of our soldiers—fully developed physically—had "the mentality of a thirteen-year-old child." Of course such tests are not infallible, yet there

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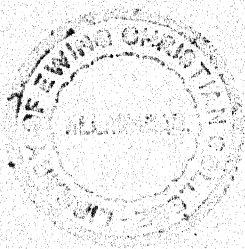


can be no doubt that most people are but children in intellectual development. Need we be surprised when we remember how few even complete a grammar school course and continue anything like serious study after they leave school? And if most people are but children in mentality, is it surprising that most Christians are but children spiritually? On this subject the "new" psychology, so much the fad of our times, is telling us in other words only what was recorded in the New Testament long ago.

According to the new psychology the problem of life is that we come to be controlled by what is called "the reality principle" rather than "the pleasure principle." We are told that it is the "Unconscious" or the "unconscious mind" which constantly prompts us to yield to the pleasure principle—which isn't new at all, for Paul says the same thing about "the flesh" or "the carnal mind." On the other hand, we are told that the reality principle has as its purpose the adaptation of the person to "reality"—that is, to all that is about him—and that it is developed through "reason," through "directed thinking," and that "the modification of the elemental urges and wishes and their adaptation to the realities of environ-



ment is a long, difficult and painful process," the result being that even when we reach adulthood in years we are still "influenced profoundly by primitive impulses and modes of thought." All of this is doubtless true; but all of it is just what we are taught in the Bible—that we are to "be no more children" but, through the substitution of spirit-control for flesh-control, are to "grow up" in all respects into the likeness of the divine ideal in Jesus Christ. Yes, we are all children still; but here is the question of supreme importance: Are we growing?



## VII

### NOT A GRADUATE BUT A PUPIL

**T**HE Christian is a disciple of Christ. To translate that term "disciple" into more familiar language, it means that the Christian is one who has enrolled or matriculated in the school of Christ. He has taken his place as a learner, a pupil.

There comes a time in human life when the child leaves the grade school and enters high school. Later, perhaps, he matriculates in college. From these successive educational institutions he graduates in due season. But *no one ever graduates* from the great school of life, unless, indeed, that day of death which we are taught to face with such dread is but a wonderful graduation day, when we take our diplomas, break the ties of school-days and launch out upon the larger life which lies beyond the limitations of time and sense.

Now, just as we remain throughout our three score years and ten as pupils in the school of life, so the time never comes to the Christian in

the flesh when he graduates from the school of Christ. He advances. He passes from class to class. He gains in knowledge of spiritual things. His conception of Christian truth and Christian character becomes clearer. But he remains a pupil—a learner. To be a disciple—a learner—is a Christian characteristic. Where it does not exist, the reality of the Christian life may well be questioned.

No Christian being a graduate and every Christian being a pupil, it is not surprising to find that the pupils are of many different grades. Indeed, while we may separate them in “grades,” a careful test would doubtless reveal the fact that no two are exactly alike or of exactly the same standing in the school. They vary all the way from those who might be assigned to the Cradle Roll to those who may be accounted as pursuing what correspond to post-graduate courses. And, of course, they differ greatly with respect to capacity and aptitude. There are some very bright pupils. But there are also some very dull pupils, like those referred to in the fifth chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews, who, at a time when they ought to have been teachers, were so backward that they needed someone to teach them “the rudiments of the first principles” and concerning

whom the writer intimates that they were unable "to discern good and evil." Such pupils are far down the scale, hardly fit for admittance to the Kindergarten. Yet they are as truly disciples as any others. It would be cruel and foolish to exclude them from the school just because they have yet so much to learn.

It is just here that persons who are not Christians, and even many who are active in the church and ought to know better, make a serious blunder. They talk and act as if one could not be a Christian at all unless he had progressed far enough to have mastered, or at least studied, certain parts of the Christian curriculum. Just what the "required subjects" are depends on who fixes the requirement. Sometimes much is required by a church, sometimes but little. The truth is, however, that a person may be one of Christ's "little ones," may be in fact a Christian disciple, even though he has not yet learned the most elemental Christian truths, just as an infant may be really alive even though he gives no sign of knowing anything. Of course, the person who is born and reared in a Christian land is sure to have some understanding of Christian character and Christian duty by the

time he is able to understand anything at all; but, though it probably never happened, it seems altogether possible that a person in some pagan land might sincerely accept Christ, be born from above, start as a real Christian disciple, without having the slightest knowledge of the simplest requirement of Christian ethics.

A story has been told which illustrates the statement just made. The accuracy of the tale cannot be vouched for, but it is well known that missionaries in certain lands find it necessary to give their converts months of training before it is wise to admit them to the church, and something like this may have happened: It is said that somewhere in the South Sea Islands a great religious revival was in progress and natives from distant points attended the services. One night a number of these visitors professed to become Christians, greatly to the joy of the missionaries. The next morning the missionaries were surprised to find that nearly all of their cooking utensils had disappeared and investigation revealed the fact that the new converts had taken the pots and pans and departed for their own habitations! Hypocrites, you say? But wait a moment. They were followed and found. It was explained to them that it was wrong and unchristian to take

the possessions of another; but this had not occurred to them, their desire being merely to exhibit the novel implements to their friends back home. When convinced that they had done wrong, they cheerfully returned the goods, which action was rather conclusive proof that they *were* Christians, even though they had never been taught to distinguish between mine and thine.

When Jesus told His early followers to go into all the world and make disciples He made it very plain that He did not expect such new disciples to know all about Christian duties and Christian graces. To the "Go make disciples" He added, "*teaching them* to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you." The church of today is untrue to the terms of the Great Commission if it acts, as it often does, as if a dull and untaught pupil were not a disciple at all. Of course, a Christian should do his utmost to learn and, "leaving the first principles of Christ, press on unto perfection," yet the test of a Christian is not that he is highly cultivated with respect to Christian truth, but that he *acts up* to the knowledge that he has and does the thing which he believes Christ would do under the same conditions.

In the preceding chapter reference was made

to modern psychological investigations and their discovery that the average full-grown man is still but a child as to his intellectual development. He still has much to learn. That is true, yet it is a minor matter compared with another phase of the same truth, thus stated by William J. Fielding: "A large percentage of people never grow up *psychologically* and *emotionally*, but remain at an infantile, or at the most, an adolescent level in these respects."

What is the level of the infant emotionally and psychologically? We all know. It is the level upon which the person is dominated by "the elemental urge," by "libido," in short, by the inborn natural desire to get what it wants and, what is sadder, by the *want* of only or chiefly those things which gratify babies. This *want* is fairly described by the term self-satisfaction—the satisfaction of physical necessities or of the desire to be pleased; the latter desire being fulfilled in babies by a rattle, for instance—or by a jazz band, which is merely a grown-up rattle. This inborn "urge" and its satisfaction are all-important to the infant. His very life depends on them. In response to a biological necessity he howls lustily till he gets what he needs. But what a pity, what a tragedy, if he never becomes more than




a child and goes through life whining and howling just for self-satisfaction!

Now, even a Christian may develop very slowly, and it must be confessed that pastors have to spend a good deal of time going about with a bottle and a spoon ministering to "babes in Christ" who appear to be suffering from a kind of spiritual marasmus. But it is safe to say that wherever there is a true Christian he will steadily, even if slowly, make progress "unto the knowledge of the truth." He will have a new "urge" to know and do the will of God, and, as he learns, his *wants* will change from those which demand only self-satisfaction to those which cause him to give his life in loving service.



## VIII

### NOT A CONQUEROR BUT A COMBATANT

HE Christian life is not a state of tranquility but of war. Its symbol is not an olive branch but a sword. To enter the Christian life is not to drop anchor in a calm haven, but to enlist in an army.

A vigorous protest should be sounded against a type of professedly Christian teaching which makes the acceptance of Christ almost the equivalent of taking a pleasant opiate and which would have the church (like many a church edifice) more closely related to a graveyard than to any other institution. Young persons are taught that to become a Christian is to lose all burdens and responsibilities, to enter into an unbroken experience of soul-rest, to "sit together in heavenly places" and complacently contemplate a race sinking to eternal destruction, to await supinely a coming cataclysm when dawdling inaction shall receive the stamp of divine approval.

How diametrically opposed is such teaching to a challenge like that of Paul: "Put on the whole armor of God." Why? Because the Christian life means conflict, struggle, and "our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness" or, as translated more clearly by Moffatt, against "the potentates of the dark present, the spiritual forces of evil in the spiritual sphere." No soldier in any of the world's great armies ever marched forth to such hot conflict or against such terrible foes as must be faced by the Christian. No wonder, then, that Paul urges (Moffatt's translation): "So take God's armor, that you may be able to make a stand upon the evil day and hold your ground by overcoming all the foe. Hold your ground, tighten the belt of truth about your loins, wear integrity as your coat of mail, and have your feet shod with the stability of the gospel of peace; above all, take faith as your shield, to enable you to quench all the fire-tipped darts flung by the evil one, put on salvation as your helmet, and take the Spirit as your sword (that is, the Word of God)."

Nor is there the slightest basis for the placid, flabby, mollicoddle type of pseudo-Christianity

in the teaching of Jesus. He calls for action, not indolence. He foresaw the most stubborn opposition to the development of the Christian life—opposition both within and without the individual Christian. “Think not that I came to send peace on the earth,” He said. “I came not to send peace, but a sword.” Later, as He was about to be crucified, He told His disciples that whereas He once sent them forth without even purses, being sure of the hospitality of the people, now they should be ready to sell a cloak, if necessary, in order to buy a sword, because they would have to contend with violent opposition. Of course, Jesus was not using the words literally. Just a few hours later He condemned the use of a sword of steel in the hands of Peter. But the whole meaning of His teaching was that the Christian would have to make his way against intense opposition of a spiritual kind. Just what He meant is revealed in such words as these: “A man’s foes shall be those of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.” How hard it is to pursue consistently the Christian way when all of one’s friends, even his kinsmen, oppose the course that Christ commands! It is just that kind of a spiritual conflict that ever confronts the Christian.

“He that overcometh!” That is what a Christian is. But he cannot be an overcomer unless he is a combatant. He must overcome the opposition without. He must also overcome the opposition within—must overcome himself, and the hardest battles he ever fights are the battles with himself. And he’s still fighting!

Oh, yes, the Christian has won some victories, glorious victories. Perhaps he scarcely realized the truth at the time. He was not sure whether he was victor or vanquished, so hard-fought was the battle, so uncertain the outcome. But as he looks back over the past of his Christian life he realizes that he was not always defeated, but was often more than a conqueror through Christ who loves him. Yet there is no danger that the true Christian will ever weep like Alexander because there are no more worlds to conquer, for he learns that the battle breaks out afresh with every new day. He may one day be able to sing pæans of triumph on the plains of peace, but while life lasts he needs most of his lung power for the battle-cry.

There are plenty of foes without, but it is the foes within who never show a flag of truce and who are the most redoubtable antagonists. This is to be expected, for the moment the

Christian life begins there starts a conflict between the "new man" and the "old Adam," between "the natural man" and "the spiritual man." Immediately there come into operation two great laws, the law of "growth" and the law of "mortification"—strange but wonderfully expressive word used in the New Testament. "Mortify your members which are upon the earth," says Paul. What does he mean? Why, to mortify is to put to death, to cause to die, and when one becomes a Christian, when he has the ruling purpose to become Christlike, then, of course, he will undertake just what Paul enjoins in that third chapter of Colossians: He will (1) "aim at what is above" and (2) strive to "put to death those members that are on earth: sexual vice, impurity, appetite, evil desire, etc." (By the way, it is interesting to observe that our modern psychologists talk about "sublimation" as if they had made a great discovery; but Paul seems to mean the same thing by his word "mortification.") But, as we have seen, development in the higher life is a slow process and the old "members" are persistent and do not want to be put to death, and the consequence is daily, hourly conflict between the old life and the new. The Christian needs ever to pray:

*"Since I must fight if I would win,  
Increase my courage, Lord."*

"He that overcometh!" Did you ever read through at one sitting those seven messages to the seven churches of Asia as recorded in the second and third chapters of the Revelation? Read them some day. You will discover that two things are common to all seven epistles. One is the simple, cheering truth of the familiar hymn, "Jesus knows all about our troubles"— knows where we dwell, our trials, our problems, our sore temptations. The other is that every promise made is "to him that overcometh." The hidden manna, the white stone, the new name, the white garments, even "authority over the nations" are all for "him that overcometh." And then, at the end of the seventh letter, it is all summed up in these wonderful words: "He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, *as I also overcame and sat down with my Father in his throne.*"

Yes, the purpose to be conformed to Jesus Christ means the purpose to "fight the good fight of faith" and be ever ready to "suffer hardship—as a good soldier of Jesus Christ," knowing that ultimate victory is certain and that a crown of rejoicing awaits the victor.



## IX

### NOT A SAINT BUT A SINNER

**I**N writing an account of evangelistic meetings for publication in a church paper, a minister reported that there were very large congregations every night, but added, "there were very few sinners present at any of the services." Unfortunately that habit of designating as "sinners" only those persons who are not professing Christians is altogether too common. Perhaps it is due to this use of the word that men outside of the church sneeringly refer to all church members as "saints," apparently believing that to profess to be a Christian is equivalent to claiming to be exceptionally holy. As comparatively few Christians give any indication of the halo of sanctity, the misunderstanding leads to disrespect.

The term "saint" was used in New Testament times to designate all Christians, not as exceptionally holy persons, but as persons set apart from others by virtue of the fact that they sought to become holy; not as perfect



people but as people who were aiming at and striving after perfection. It is clear that this is Paul's meaning when he uses the word. He tells us that one of the objects in view in the calling of various kinds of Christian workers—evangelists, pastors and teachers—is “the perfecting of the saints,” who would certainly need no perfecting if they were already perfect. Indeed, it is apparent that many of the “saints” to whom Paul wrote his epistles were very far from perfect. He finds it necessary to urge upon the saints of Ephesus that they must not lie or steal or indulge in gross immorality; he charges the saints at Corinth with being still “carnal”; he exhorts the saints at Philippi to do nothing through faction or vainglory, but cultivate the mind of Christ and think on the things that are true and honorable and just and lovely, and the saints at Colossæ to “put to death . . . fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire and covetousness, which is idolatry,” and also to put away “anger, wrath, malice, railing, shameful speaking out of your mouth . . . seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man, that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him.” Clearly, Paul's “saints” were very much the same kind

of common folk to be found in the churches of today. The Christians of then and now were and are the men and women who are seeking to overcome the "old man" and perfect the "new man."

It is only in a comparative sense that we are justified in speaking of some exceptional Christian characters as "saints." In the absolute sense there are no saints, and there never were any. We like to honor the name of the great apostle to the Gentiles by giving him the title of Saint Paul, but Paul himself repudiated all claims to saintliness. We talk and write about "Saint Peter," and if tradition is to be trusted he died so nobly the death of a martyr that the title is worthily bestowed; yet it was this same disciple who denied his Lord with curses and who must have been, through most of the Master's days on earth, a sore trial to his fellows. Even John, probably the gentlest and saintliest of all the disciples, subjected himself to the Master's sharp rebuke because, with James, his temper got the better of him and he was ready to call down fire from heaven to destroy some villagers who failed in hospitality. And all of the "saints" since manufactured in ecclesiastical mills were, after all, but poor sinners, saved by grace.

True, there have been and are deluded Christians who consider themselves perfect—and are apt to become very angry if their claim is questioned. But the claim itself is sufficient proof of their shortcoming, for not even a near-saint will be found boasting of his saintliness. Rather, he will be heard saying, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Indeed, the more progress one makes toward holiness, the more likely he is to be keenly conscious of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. This truth is rather strikingly set forth in Paul’s life and letters. In one of his earlier epistles, that to the Galatians, Paul manifests a strong tendency to emphasize the fact that he was no ordinary man, but an apostle of such standing and independence that his teachings should be most humbly accepted and followed. A little later, in the first epistle to the Corinthians, he speaks of himself as “the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle.” Still later, in Ephesians, Paul represents himself as “less than the least of all saints,” and when near the end of his life, in First Timothy, he writes about “sinners, *of whom I am chief.*” Was Paul less of a Christian as he neared the end of his remarkable life of devoted service? Surely not, but he was

more conscious of sin in his members and more humble and dependent on God.

The difference between the Christian and the Not Christian is not that the former is a saint and the latter a sinner. Both are sinners. True, as Dr. Washington Gladden once said, "The deliberate and habitual practise of any form of dishonesty or immorality is impossible to one who follows Christ," and therefore the church is justified in rejecting such a person from its membership, whatever his profession. Nevertheless, Christians are sinners and daily find occasion to lift their faces to the heavenly Father with confession and repentance. The difference between the two kinds of sinners may be thus expressed:

The Not Christian is a sinner who cherishes and takes pleasure in sin;

The Christian is a sinner whose attitude toward sin is that of constant opposition and growing hatred.

The Not Christian, for instance, is often one who takes pride in tyrannical bearing and violent temper and so develops the very qualities which ought to be uprooted; but the Christian is quickly ashamed of his outbursts of temper and assiduously cultivates considerateness and self-control. The one sinks deeper into the


mire of sin; the other, little by little, gets his feet on firmer ground. The one becomes more and more a victim; the other more and more a victor. To sin deliberately and persistently is to walk in darkness, and if any who so walk in darkness say that they have fellowship with God they "lie and do not the truth." Yet "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and do not the truth."

The Christian is still a sinner and conscious of his sinfulness; but he also has the joy of knowing that "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Yes, and he also has that ruling purpose, God-born, which impels him ever onward and upward and prompts him to heed the apostle's injunction: "Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Thus, as years pass, he comes to see more clearly the exceeding sinfulness of sin and to seek more zealously the beauty of holiness, and, "beholding as in a mirror the glory (character) of the Lord," he is gradually "transformed into the same image from glory to glory (from character to character)."

## X

### NOT SAVED BUT BEING SAVED

S the assertion of the chapter title startling? Well, like most epigrammatic sentences or phrases, it does not express the whole truth. At the same time, it comes much nearer to the whole truth than to speak of Christians in the popular manner as being "persons who are saved."

Man's salvation must always be thought of in three tenses—perfect, imperfect, and future-perfect. The glorious truth is always incomplete when we think of it in one tense only. In one limited sense the Christian is now "saved." In a much more vital sense he is "being saved." He "will have been saved" only when, in the fulness of time, "God hath made the pile complete." "By grace ye *are saved*," "now is our salvation *nearer* than when we believed," "he that endureth unto the end *shall* be saved."

As used in the Bible, the various parts of the word "save" have three distinct meanings. The word is used frequently in the sense of



- 1/ accomplished deliverance, especially deliverance from peril or enemies. Indeed, in parts of the Old Testament the word translated "deliver" is the same word commonly translated "save." 2/ A second meaning of the word is "to make sound" or "to make whole." In this sense the word always carries the idea of incompleteness, and it relates to an inward rather than an outward deliverance. And this, by the way, is the sense in which the word is almost invariably used in the New Testament. 3/ The third meaning (found mainly in the Old Testament) is "to give ease"—surcease from trouble, freedom from conflict, rest and refuge. It is in substantially these three senses that we must think of the word as applied to the Christian.

With respect to the past, the Christian is *saved*—from what for the Not Christian is the sure and inevitable penalty or consequence of sin. It is this fact which is the basis of the great doctrine of "justification." "The wages of sin is death"—spiritual death. It would be beyond the scope of this discussion to enter into a consideration of what sin is from the theological point of view or of how, through God's undeserved favor, because of His nature of love, man is "justified;" but, from the point



of view of life, sin is that which causes a man to fall short of that higher life for which he was designed. Hence, the natural result of sin is death—missing the higher life. The consequence of that failure to enter into and enjoy the higher life is so certain that Scripture speaks of the Not Christian as one who is already “dead in trespasses and sins” as one “condemned already.” But the Christian is one who has been “quickened” or made alive spiritually, and therefore he is “saved” from spiritual death. This is an accomplished fact. He that hath the son, *hath life*—eternal life, which is not a promised gift but a present possession. He “*hath* everlasting life, and *shall not come* into condemnation; but *is passed* from death unto life.”

With respect to the present, the Christian is “*being saved.*” Salvation is a process going on within, the development of the life which the Christian has. Though already delivered from sin’s inevitable consequences, the Christian is not yet delivered from his lower self, from the power of sin over his own life; he is not yet *sound* and *whole*. Hence, he is admonished to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” The truth contained in the preceding paragraph and in this one is

*Development.*

strikingly set forth in the fifth chapter of Paul's epistle to the Romans and is summed up in these words of the tenth verse: "If, *while* we were *enemies*, we were *reconciled* to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we *be saved* by his life," that is, by the living Christ—"Christ in us the hope of glory." Because of God's wondrous love, manifested preëminently in the life and death of Jesus, man is "pardoned," freed from his bondage to sin and spiritual death, given a new life "from above"—the God life, the love life, the very life that was in the Nazarene. But Jesus came not only that men might have life but that they might have that life "abundantly;" and so the Christian is ever *being saved*, being made more and more sound and whole, as he develops into the image and likeness of Christ. Conversion is not an end. It is merely a beginning.

With respect to the future, the Christian is yet to be saved—salvation being the glorious consummation of which even the beloved disciple could say no more than this: "Beloved, *now* are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, *we shall be like him*; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that

hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

The past was bondage, from which the Christian has been delivered.

The present is a battle which the Christian is fighting—a battle with self, through which conflict he becomes more like his Master.

The future is victory, rest, ease—bondage escaped, conflict over, enemies all put to rout, nothing to interfere with the exercise of the higher life of endless activity in joyous, loving service.

It is only when we enter into some understanding of what is involved in complete "salvation" that we can get the full force of such a familiar passage as that which says, "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved," or of the promise to the church at Ephesus, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life." Peter speaks of Christians as those who are "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time," and Paul expresses his confidence that "the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work and will save me unto his heavenly kingdom." "Salvation is far from the wicked," but for him who is being saved "now is our salvation nearer than

when we believed," and one day he shall "awake in his likeness" and cry out with joy, "the Lord Jehovah is become my salvation."

Out on the western desert are millions of grotesque, twisted cactus plants, covered with sharp, dangerous thorns—"condemned" plants, for men have said, "they are worthless; nothing good can come of them." But, by experiment after experiment, Burbank succeeded in developing in the cactus plant a new life which gradually overcame the old, natural, cactus life and produced a plant that is useful instead of harmful. Thus the cactus is no longer "condemned" but *being saved* for some useful function. The change is not from without but from within. The thornless cactus is not produced by cutting off the thorns but by the development of a new life which produces not thorns but fruit. The change is not sudden; it is the result of a process, the development of a new life. Thus natural science comes with its testimony that it is possible to transform life; but this has been the testimony of Christian experience for thousands of years. Thorns have disappeared, fruit has developed, men and women have been transformed by the development of the Christ life within. That is "salvation."

## XI

### NOT A RULER BUT A SERVANT

**D**OUBTLESS many Christians find satisfaction and comfort in the sentiment of that long popular gospel hymn, "I'm the child of a King." It is not improper that they should. The fatherhood of God is a blessed truth, and when we think of the heavenly Father's love and care it is cheering to remember that the God of love is also the omnipotent God, with limitless resources, so that we can confidently sing,

*"My Father is rich in houses and lands;  
He holdeth the wealth of the world in His  
hands."*

While the Christian's relation to the infinite God is beautifully expressed by that figure of speech which makes him an adopted son of the King of Kings and a prince of the spiritual realm, yet the Christian spirit is not at all like the spirit of the typical prince, who jealously holds to his prerogatives as a ruler, reckons

himself as above his fellows, demands that countless courtiers shall minister to his whims as well as to his needs. On the contrary, the Christian attitude is invariably that of Him who said, "I am in the midst of you as he who serveth." The Christian may be pathetically immature or close to maturity, a dull or a bright pupil, often defeated or usually victorious, far from holiness in living or remarkably Christlike; but, whatever his stage of development, the real Christian always possesses something of the spirit which prompts him to serve his fellow men.

It is service which comes nearest to being the touchstone of the Christian life. No man is fully competent to judge whether another is really a Christian. Only He who knows the hearts of men can render unfailing judgment. But the one test which Scripture encourages us to apply is the test of service. "By their fruits ye shall know them," said the Master. The reason for His repudiation and rejection of some quite sure of their own good standing is, "inasmuch as ye did it not." How wonderfully tender and considerate Jesus was of persons of whom we would speak as great sinners—"He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone!" How tolerant He was of

persons outside of His own little circle of disciples—"He that is not against us is for us!" Indeed, it was on that occasion, when the disciples wanted Him to put a stop to the activities of a man who "followed not us," that Jesus said, "There is no man who shall do a mighty work in my name, and be able quickly to speak evil of me." But, on the other hand, when men made professions without rendering service, Jesus was ready to say, "I never knew you," and he explained that "not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven." According to the Master's appraisal of the Christian life, *the sign of sincerity is service.*

There is no Christian spirit where there is no service. Men may prate as they please about their faith, but "faith without works is dead," just as a body with no spirit in it is dead. Men may testify of their Christian hope, but "every one that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand." Men may proclaim with fervor their love toward God, but "if a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar." "Whoso hath the world's goods, and beholdeth



his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him?" In that same passage John tells us that the way we know love is "because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." The spirit that was in Jesus was manifested to the world through loving service, and when one is really a Christian, when his ruling purpose is in accord with that which actuated Jesus, the Christian spirit and purpose will be manifested in the same manner. "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit, and *so* shall ye be my disciples." "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit." The only faith that is Christian faith is "faith that worketh by love."

Throughout the ministry of Jesus the utmost prominence is given to the truth that the Christian spirit is the spirit of a servant, but never was that truth presented so vividly, so emphatically, as when, on the last night with His disciples, Jesus proclaimed it by both precept and example. It was the hour of the last supper. They were together for the solemn fellowship of leave-taking. Yet, even in that hour, so deep-seated is human selfishness, there broke out a quarrel among the disciples. Each

wanted to be counted greatest. Each sought the place of honor. Each manifested the spirit of the prince and desired his own exaltation. Said Jesus: "The kings of the Gentiles have lordship over them"—that is the world's way—"but ye shall not be so." Then He took a towel and a basin and, like a common slave, washed the feet of the disciples.

Notice more carefully what we are told: "He knew that his hour was come"—yet, facing death, He paused to perform this humble service. He knew "that the Father had given all things into his hands"—yet He knelt to wash their feet. He knew that Judas was a traitor—yet he washed Judas' feet! Have we ever put those three facts together? At the hour of death, the King of Glory—washed the feet of a traitor! Why? That thus, sharply, convincingly, He might contrast the spirit of self-seeking and the spirit of service; that thus He might set forth by deed as well as by word the supreme Christ principle—*love manifested in service*. Then He said—heed the words—"I have given unto you an example, that ye should also do as I have done to you. . . . A servant is not greater than his lord. . . . If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them." A statement made by George Arthur

Andrews is hardly too strong when he says that one "cannot truly be a Christian unless with Christ he has conscientiously accepted the obligation and the privileges of sacrificing service."

But, after all, it is the servant of mankind who becomes a prince among men. Which type of man do we most admire? Is it the one who is a self-seeker, who insists that self-preservation is the first law of nature; or is it the man who is ready to imperil his own life that he may serve another? Is not the latter the truly princely man? With respect to power and celebrity, there are two courses open. One leads to the tyranny of selfishness; the other to the royalty of service. Who, after all, have been and are the truly great of past and present, the kingly men and queenly women? The real monarchs of mankind have been and are the men and women who, through extraordinary service, have ascended step by step to enthronement in the universal heart. The verdict of the race confirms the teaching of Jesus that he who would be greatest must be a sacrificing servant. The way to the crown is the way of the cross. The Christian is one who walks in that way.

## XII

### ONE WITH GOD IN PURPOSE

**I**F preceding chapters have left any impression at all upon the reader, he will probably agree that those impressions may be reduced to and summed up in three very simple propositions, as follows:

The Christian is one whose ruling purpose is to realize a divine ideal;

The Christian is one who is actually making progress toward the realization of that divine ideal;

The Christian is one who still has far to go before realizing the divine ideal.

The definition of a Christian which has been kept steadily before us is one which may be called universally inclusive. To be sure, it excludes as "none of His" all who totally lack that ruling purpose, but it includes every kind of a Christian. It takes in the strongest, the holiest, the most perfect; but it does not exclude the weakest "babe in Christ."

The real "tie that binds" in one bundle all

sorts and kinds of Christians is not that they subscribe with the same degree of heartiness to a common creed, or that they are associated in a common organization, or that they are characterized by uniformity of conduct under given circumstances, but that, however they may differ in other respects, they are bound together in one great living family because of their *identity of purpose*. Some are far in advance of others. Some march sturdily forward with vigorous strides while others lag and loiter or must frequently rest by the wayside. Some have a clear vision of the goal while others grope their way in partial blindness. But all are alike in this: They are *alive* and *on the way*.

And the goal? Why, it is nothing short of complete unity with God! Probably no two men have or can have exactly the same conception of just what that means, and he attempts a hopeless task who undertakes to explain the fulness of its meaning. But it does not have to be fully explained. Conceive the meaning, if you prefer, in the terms of the Oriental mystic, or say with his Occidental counterpart that it is to be "in tune with the Infinite," or interpret it, with the "practical" man, as living the simple life of self-sacrificing helpfulness that Jesus lived—this matters little. The essential

truth is that the Christian is one who presses on toward the goal "unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

And the problem of every-day life for the Christian (though it may not be present as a problem for the Not Christian) is what the psychologists call the "unification of personality." Explain it as we will, or leave it unexplained, we are day by day face to face with the inescapable fact that "the flesh (by which Paul means our human nature) lusteth against the Spirit (the new ruling purpose) and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary the one to the other." Complete unity with God in any sense can never be attained until this conflict is past and the person himself is unified, the "Spirit" being dominant. This was true of Jesus. He, too, knew the striving of flesh against Spirit, but with Him the Spirit was always victorious and so He manifested to the world a oneness with the Father which is the ideal for every Christian. Far from that oneness, are we? Truly we are; yet here is the glorious and inspiring truth:

In one respect, in a particular which is fundamental to all else, in the very essence of his being, the Christian is already in unity with God, for he is *one with God in purpose*. Is the

Christian one with God in that he actually *does* God's will at every turn? By no means. At least, who has ever discovered such a Christian? But the Christian is one with God to this extent: He *wills to do* just what God wills to have him do. What may be called the determinative will of the Christian is already in accord with the will of God, this being the one essential fact which makes him a Christian; and in this determinative will are wrapped up all of the possibilities, nay, all of the certainties, of ultimate achievement. As all that ultimately appears in the most remarkable human life—all of physical stature and strength, all of intellectual power, all of the dreams and designs and ambitions which manifest themselves in science and art and music—lie enfolded within the insignificant germ of life, the human protoplasm, so all that the spiritual man may become are wrapped up in that heaven-born ruling purpose which is the basis of achievement in the spiritual sphere.

There is a remarkable passage of Scripture which brings us in clearest terms the truth here set forth, but to get its force let us retrace our steps for a moment and recall our tentative definition of a Christian: "A Christian is one whose ruling purpose in life *is to become con-*



formed, not only outwardly in conduct but inwardly in mind and spirit, to the divine ideal, as manifested in Jesus Christ." That expresses the Christian purpose with respect to his own life. Now, what is God's purpose concerning human life? What would God have men to be? Here is the answer as given by Paul in the eighth chapter of his epistle to the Romans. "Whom he foreknew, he also foreordained (or predestinated) *to be conformed to the image of his Son!*" "Predestination?" Is anyone afraid of the term? Does anyone rebel against it? Here is its meaning made manifest: It is God's purpose, God's good pleasure, that men should be conformed to the image of his Son!

What is the meaning of this truth for the Christian? It has wonderful meaning. It means that the Infinite God is *with him* in the working out of his purpose in life, and "if God be for us, who can be against us?" Yes, the Christian is conscious of being distressingly lacking when he ventures to compare himself with the divine ideal; but one thing he has: He has a ruling purpose which is in accord with the divine purpose, and in this purpose lie all of the possibilities of the divine likeness and all the certainty of divine coöperation. And when the Christian discovers that God's pur-

pose and his own purpose are in accord, he also discovers that he is certainly on the right track in being a *Christian*; for, however else made manifest, God's purpose is manifested preëminently in *Jesus Christ*. Of old God made known His purpose "by divers portions and in divers manners"—through the prophets, for instance, as when Micah said: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth Jehovah require of thee, but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God?"—but in the latter days God revealed Himself and His purpose "in his Son," who is "the express image of his person."

God's purpose for man is that a man become like Christ.

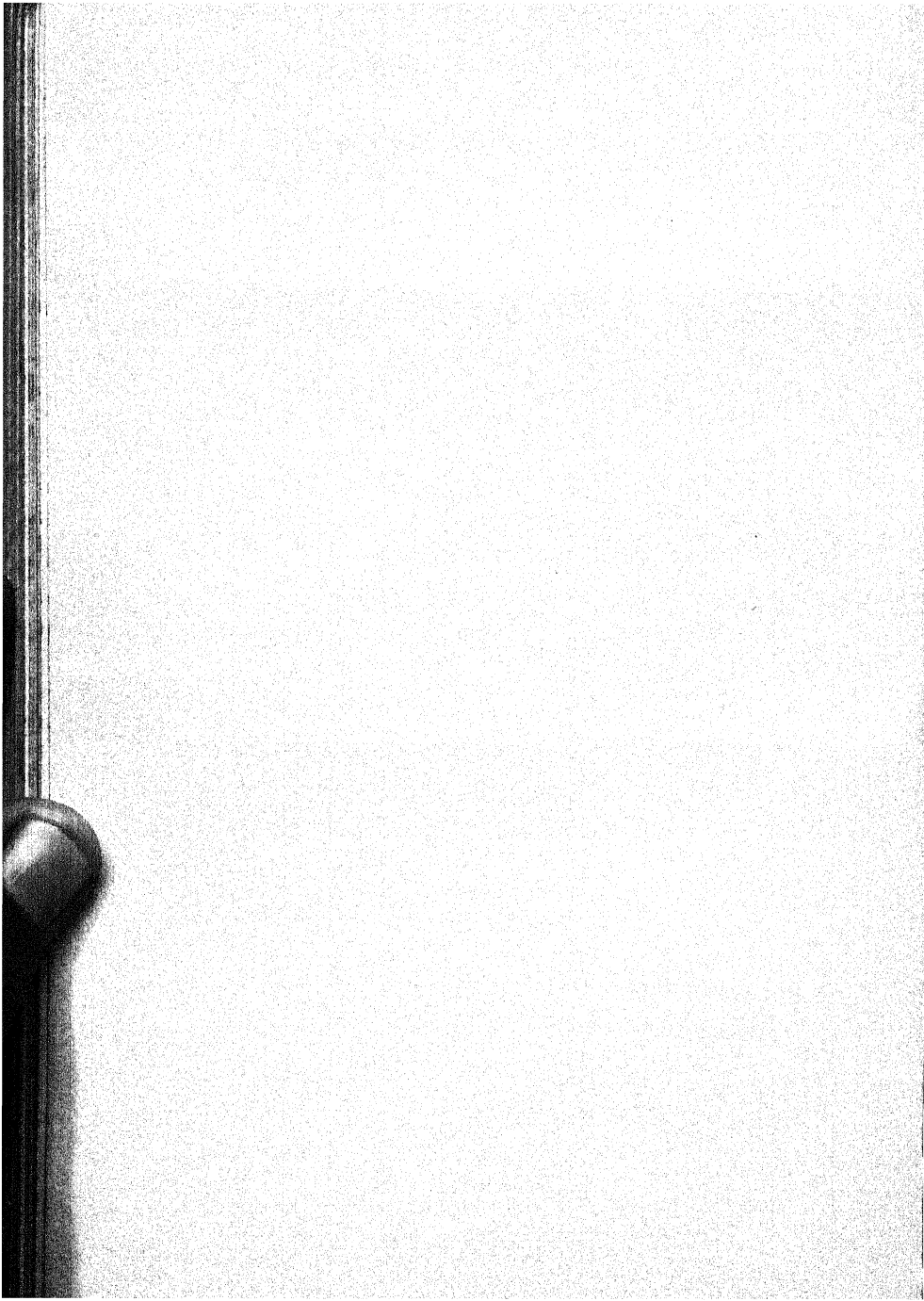
The Christian is one whose ruling purpose in life is in accord with the divine purpose—to become like Jesus Christ.

There is a thought even more inspiring than that of personal attainment. It is that to be a Christian means to be a living factor in working out the Eternal Father's "bright design" in the creation of man—the realization of himself in sonship!

We are told that we are "laborers together with God." Yes, and we are also told that "it is God who worketh in you both to will and to

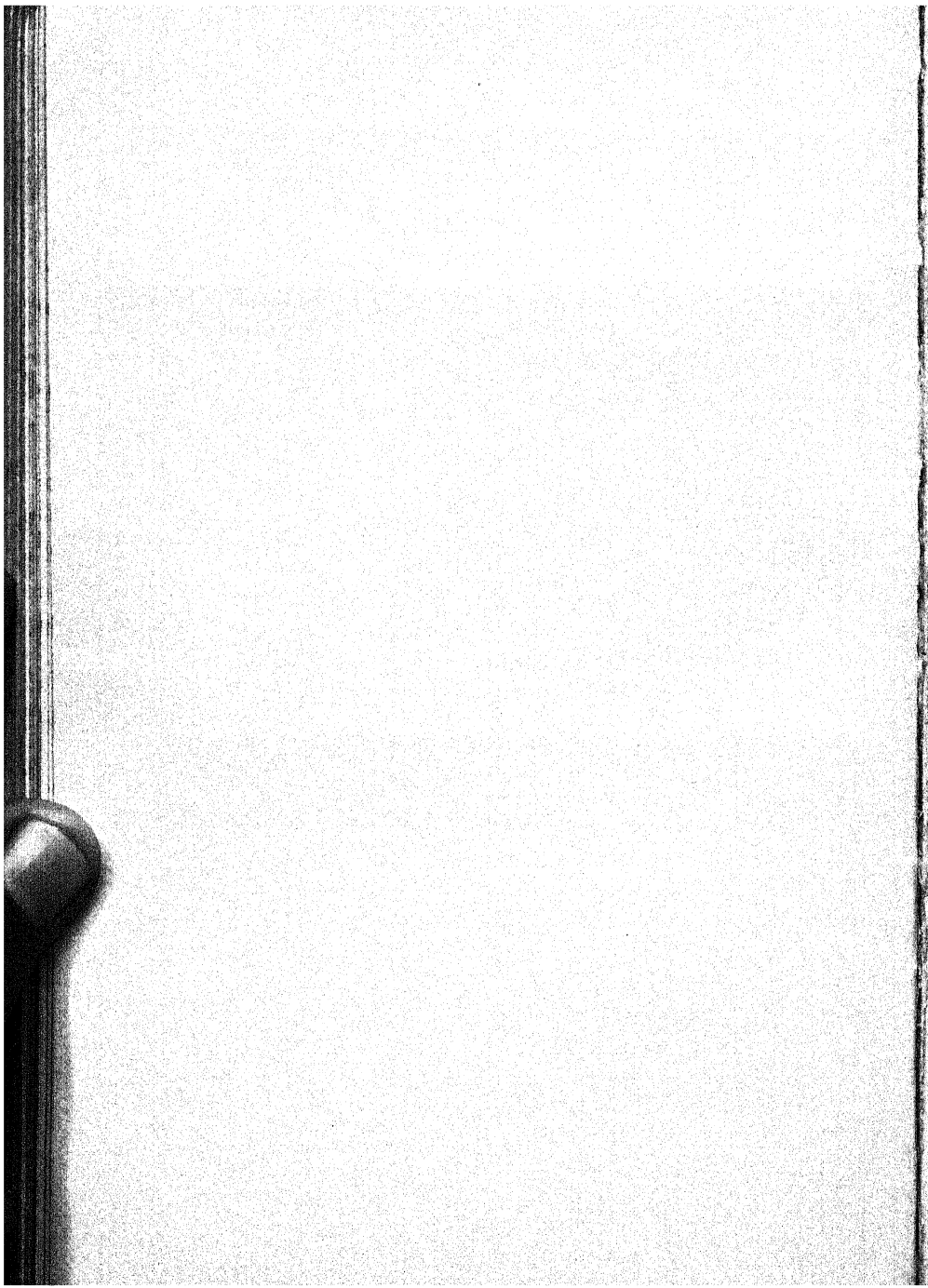
work, for his good pleasure." Well, to what end are we to work with God? To what end does God work in us?

Go back to the very beginnings of our sacred Scriptures and we hear God saying, "Let us make man in our own image." But what is God's image? In "the fulness of time" it was made plain. The image of God was revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. Hence to be a Christian, to be dominated by the purpose to become like Christ, to develop in the likeness of the Christ, is to coöperate with God in the realization of His eternal purpose, His ultimate aim—a family of Christ-like sons, which will be the kingdom of heaven on earth.



## II

“WHO IS THIS SON OF MAN?”



### XIII

#### AN AGE-OLD QUESTION

**T**HROUGHOUT the chapters of the first part of this little volume there has run a certain assumption. It is that the divine ideal was actually manifested in the person of Jesus the Christ. The definition which was adopted as a working hypothesis declared the Christian to be one whose ruling purpose in life is to be conformed to the divine ideal as manifested in Jesus Christ. That definition does more than set Jesus before us as an ideal. It presents Him as the *divine* ideal. Throughout the whole discussion ran the distinction between possible conformity to some human standard and that "stretching forward . . . toward the goal" of likeness to the divine. The Christian has been described, not as one who has "arrived," but as one who presses on in order to lay hold upon that for which he was laid hold upon by God, namely, "to be conformed to the image of his son." His goal is much higher than any human goal, we say. Yet it is also



said that the goal is the very likeness of Jesus Christ. All such teaching assumes that Jesus Christ was more than man. What basis is there for such an assumption?

Doubtless most of those for whom this message is intended never raise that question for themselves. For them it is settled. We who are Christians and who seek a fuller Christian life are not, as a rule, troubled by doubts concerning the Person on whom we believe, for we have had from childhood the advantages of Christian teaching. There are exceptions to such a statement, of course, but most mature persons who are Christians received instruction in the home and the church in their early days, which instruction settled certain questions which have been and are disturbing to others. A recent questionnaire on religion revealed the fact that practically the same number of people who declared themselves to be active church members also related that they had been reared in Christian families. This means that they had known from infancy and probably had accepted for themselves the familiar teachings of the Christian home. Their beliefs are grounded in more or less familiarity with Scripture and Christian tradition and they developed in the atmosphere

of a Christian environment marked by reverence for Jesus Christ as the very Son of God.

It is not to be forgotten, however, that there have been and are many persons who enjoyed no such advantages. This was true of the contemporaries of Jesus. They had neither the New Testament Scriptures nor any of that Christian tradition which is steadily handed down to new generations even where the Bible is neither studied nor read. And, of course, they had no Christian environment. None of these things existed for them. The reverence that was developed in the most religious Jewish homes was reverence for the Law, and even the Jewish teaching about the Messiah gave to children of that day no clue whatever to the meaning of such a life as was lived among them by Jesus of Nazareth. As a consequence, we find in the Gospel narratives that the people of His own times were constantly raising questions and demanding of one another some explanation of the Person who had appeared among them.

On at least five different occasions we find the puzzled people asking the direct question, "Who is this?" and in other forms the same inquiry appears again and again. They simply could not account for Jesus. They were all

the more puzzled because they knew so well the village in which He grew up, the general character of the people there, and even the immediate relatives of Jesus. For instance, it is recorded in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew that when, in "his own country," He had taught His former neighbors in their synagogue "they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joseph, and Simon, and Judas? and his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?" They could not explain Jesus, yet they evidently felt that there was something about Him which must needs be accounted for.

Especially did the Jewish teachers, the scribes and Pharisees, feel that Jesus must be accounted for in some fashion and so, as at the time mentioned in the fifth chapter of Luke, they proceeded to solve the problem off-hand by saying that He was a blasphemer. They were just as human as the rest of us, and the easiest way to account for some one who is not like the general run of people and does things not in accord with prevailing customs is to call him names. When some unusual person

appears and we cannot understand him we are prone to call him a traitor, a "red," a "crank," or a heretic and then settle down in smug complacency, thinking we have accounted for him. But men like Nicodemus are never satisfied with such appeals to prejudice and tradition, and deep in their sincere souls the question, "Who is this?" continues to reverberate until they attain satisfaction through an answer of their own.

There are many in our own times who are honestly asking the same question—"Who is this Son of Man?" Indeed, thinking men and women cannot dismiss the question from their minds. They are assured that there was such a person as Jesus of Nazareth. To be sure, now and then there arises some one who attempts to show that the whole story of Jesus is a legend or myth, that no such person ever existed; but their labored efforts are not taken very seriously. Of the historic fact that Jesus lived and died there is not the slightest doubt, and if anyone still questions that historic fact, then he is in greater trouble; for if there was no Jesus to account for, then we are under the necessity of accounting for some one who invented Jesus. That problem is even more difficult. However, the fact of Jesus being

generally admitted, we still confront the question which many are asking, "How shall we account for that 'Son of Man'?" They ask that question of us, and we are under obligation to point the way to a satisfying answer if we can. How shall we do it? Well, there are at least four ways of accounting for Jesus. Let us consider them.

## XIV

### THE ANSWER OF AUTHORITY

**T**HE first and commonest way to answer the question of persons who are puzzled and perplexed is what we may call the way of authority. It is the way by which the question has been answered for most of us and to our satisfaction. We believe the Bible to be truly the Word of God, to contain God's revelation of Himself to man, and therefore we point to the explicit affirmations of Scripture, to the Messianic prophecies and their fulfillment in Jesus, to His own unequivocal declarations concerning Himself, and we say, "The Bible makes it plain that Jesus was truly God manifest in the flesh. There is the answer and the explanation. We need none other."

Of course that is true—for *us*. It is a fact that *we* need no other answer. From infancy we have heard the beautiful stories of the birth of the Babe of Bethlehem whose entrance upon human life so disturbed the political powers of earth and was marked by the very opening of

the gates of heaven. Moreover, we have long believed that the one reliable source of information on such a subject is the Bible, and its record is plain and positive. Why should anyone who has access to the Scriptures continue to ask questions? In the Book of Books they are answered without the shadow of uncertainty. Besides those affirmations of Scripture, we have the record of the miracles wrought by Jesus, including that supreme miracle, His resurrection, and these records would give us a satisfactory answer even if we found no direct assertions. For us the Bible is final authority, and there can be no doubt about its teaching.

It behooves us to remember, however, that the world is full of people who have no such convictions as we have concerning the authority of the Bible. Why should they have, after all? Our convictions are so strong not just because some one else told us that the Bible is true, but because we have put it to the test and have proved its value in personal experience. Like one of a past generation, over against many a passage of Scripture we have written a large T—meaning, “tried”—and then we have written a large P—meaning, “proved.” Because of such personal experience, no one



could shake our confidence in the Bible as a means through which God makes known His will and His way to men. But millions of our fellow-men have had no such experience with the Word of God. Hence, when we go to them and say, "You must believe thus and so because the Bible says so," they answer, "But how do we know that the statements of the Bible are to be relied upon?"

It is very unjust—also very unwise—to turn away from such inquirers as if they were not sincere and honest in their questioning. It is much worse to follow the example set by the Pharisees and, because we cannot understand their attitude, denounce them as blasphemers or infidels. Our business is to help them into eternal life. The writer is one who is sure that the critically-minded young people of today are as sincere, as honest, as high-minded as any generation of young people that ever lived. But we need to remember that they have been trained to question. Most of us who are much older, and most of the members of the generations which preceded ours, were trained to *accept*, rather than to question. Consequently, we did not meet with our acute mental problems until much later in life—and the diseases of childhood are apt to be much more serious

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Young People

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to older people. Today our boys and girls are taught to inquire into truth from, or even before, the high school period. Therefore, they are apt frankly to question what was formerly meekly accepted by youth. They are not inclined to accept much of anything merely on the say-so of someone else. They want to know, Why? It is well that they do, for convictions which mold life come only from personal experience. They have to be born from within—perhaps only after great travail of soul. They have to be one's own offspring, so to speak, not adopted children.

Whether the reader agrees with the preceding paragraph or not, we have to face the fact that all about us are boys and girls, men and women, who are honest in their questioning attitudes and cannot find satisfaction and peace by the way of authority. If we say to them, "This is the declaration of Scripture, and must be believed because the Bible says so," they reply in all sincerity, "Before we can agree with you we must first be convinced that the Bible states the truth." If we point to the miraculous birth, they answer: "This, too, as an argument, is rooted in the belief in the truth of Scripture, and we are not yet sure. Besides, other ancient documents claim similar miracu-

lous births for other persons." If we confront them with the miracles, they remind us that the fact of such miracles also rests upon the statements of Scripture, and they are likely to add: "The Jews also had miracle-working prophets, but did not claim that such prophets were more than men. Moreover, the New Testament Apocrypha contain accounts of many other miracles, which accounts are rejected by the church as unauthentic; how can we know which should be accepted and which rejected?" Thus they stand with their questions, and the way of authority does not help them to answer their inquiry about Jesus of Nazareth.

It is a good way for those of us who have grown up in an atmosphere of faith, but it is probably the poorest way to answer the inquiry of those who have no background of either tradition or experience. So we leave the way of authority and consider other methods of accounting for Jesus.

## XV

### THE ANSWER OF HISTORY

**L**ET us turn from the affirmations of authority and take just a glimpse of what history reveals as throwing light upon our question. It can be little more than a glimpse, yet just a glimpse is wonderfully enlightening. Let us ask what were the conditions in the midst of which Jesus lived and what was His relation to His environment.

Consider first the social environment. Jesus was born of a peasant, and reared in a peasant home. He grew up in the midst of the life of a typical peasant village of Palestine. What was the peasant life of that day and country like? Limitations of space will not permit of detail, but it must be said in general that the people of the peasant class were poor, ignorant, superstitious and oppressed, little more than "brothers of the ox," as Markham might have called them, many of them physically blind and nearly all but "blind followers of the blind" from the viewpoint of mental and spiritual at-

tainment. Jesus, from the viewpoint of history, must have been one who was touched on all sides and through thirty years by the influences of the environment of the Galilean peasant.

Consider the political environment in the midst of which He lived and grew to manhood. It was an environment of narrow nationalism and intense racial pride; an environment of bitter, passionate antagonism to the Roman power; an environment which quivered with hate-born determination to overthrow the tyrannical oppressors of the Jews and establish a political kingdom which should dominate all the world, and at the head of which would be the coming Messiah, mighty in temporal power and overcoming all enemies as enemies had always been overcome from the dawn of history. Such was the political environment of Jesus.

Then, consider His religious environment. The passionate political purpose of the people had become in fact their religion. What passed for religion was a cold, formal Pharisaism. It was on the whole a religion from which the spirit had fled and which demanded little more than outward conformity to a confusing jumble of ceremonial laws and social regulations. It



was well illustrated in the story of the Pharisee who stood on a street corner and the story of the priest and the Levite who passed by on the other side.

Now, in the very midst of such an environment—social, political, and religious—there suddenly appeared a Person who was not a part of it in any sense, who rose supremely above it all, who thought and felt and acted so differently from the companions with whom He had grown to manhood that high and low, rich and poor, leaders and followers, cried out in amazement, "Who is this Son of Man?" How are we to account for such a Person in the midst of such an environment? Consider the contrast somewhat more in detail.

Think first of the teaching of Jesus. If we are to judge from a passage in John's Gospel, Jesus must have had very little education, as was certainly true of most of those among whom He lived. The question was asked, "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" But that question was asked because "the Jews marvelled" at His matchless teaching. He was altogether different from the scribes. He did not deliver long, dull addresses dealing with some jot or tittle of the Law, as did most teachers of the day, but He

spoke "as one having authority" in Himself, as one who had been given an altogether unique insight into the things of God and men, and His messages had in them a warm personal appeal which interested and won His hearers. Furthermore, He openly rejected much of the tradition which had grown up about the Law. Referring to some long accepted teaching He would declare, "It hath been said of old . . . but I say unto you"—something entirely different. He knew and told them frankly that the real Law of God which had been delivered to the descendants of Abraham had been perverted and misinterpreted until it had caused men to violate the commandments of God instead of keeping them; and He also told them that He had come to "fulfill the law." In His teaching, this Galilean peasant gave to the world great, transforming truths which it had never had before in the beauty and power of their simplicity.

Jesus made clear a conception of God which mankind had never grasped, even if inspired prophets formerly had some inkling of its truth. To the mass of the people God had been thought of as a tribal, or at best a national deity; but Jesus proclaimed a universal God, not the God of a race or a nation, but the

God of all that is and of all the people of the world. Further, God was commonly looked upon as a ruler and a judge; but Jesus affirmed that God is the loving Father of all men—a God who is seeking to save the lowest and vilest, as well as “the elect,” from all the nations of the world.

Jesus gave to the world an entirely new conception of the Kingdom that is to come. His fellow-citizens looked for a King and a Kingdom. So did Jesus. But what the people expected was a panoplied prince, wielding an unconquerable sword, enthroned in splendor and surrounded by courtiers, ruling the world by resistless force. Jesus, however, proclaimed not a kingdom of things, but a kingdom of the spirit, a kingdom that is “within you,” a kingdom which begins as a grain of mustard seed but will grow, a kingdom that “consisteth not in the abundance of the things” which a man might possess and use for the control of his fellows, but in the fulness of a Christ-like life, manifesting itself in loving service.

And Jesus presented an almost unheard of method by means of which the Kingdom was to be established. It was not the method of force, about the only method then known, and, alas, the best known and most generally ap-


proved method to this day. He was no mere "pacifist." He was a militant spirit, but His weapons were not material weapons, but spiritual. He relied not upon force nor even upon outward law, but upon love—the law of God written in the hearts of men. He said in substance: "Would you be free? Then learn the truth, and the truth will make you free. Would you be righteous? Then learn to live the love-life and you will be righteous. Would you be great? Then learn to serve and you shall become great—for 'whosoever would be first among you shall be your bondservant.'"

Such, in brief outline, was His teaching. But there is something still more remarkable: Jesus practised what He preached—practised it to the bitter—but glorious—end. The thought need not be enlarged upon. His life is well known. He preached, "I, if I be lifted up." Then He went willingly to Calvary's cross. Such are just a few of the outstanding facts of history, and to this day such facts cause men to cry out:

*"Whence came the prentice carpenter whose voice  
Hath shaken kingdoms down, whose menial gibbet  
Rises triumphant o'er the wreck of empires  
And stretches out its arms among the stars?"*

## XVI

### THE ANSWER OF OBSERVATION

LOSELY related to the study of history in our effort to account for Jesus is what may be called the way of observation. This is what is meant: When we look at the world as it is and compare it with the preaching and the practise of Jesus, what is the conclusion which is forced upon us?

The strange thing is that when we attempt to look back upon Jesus we soon come to feel that strictly speaking we are not looking back at all. We are looking ahead. Not only did Jesus not fit into the environment of His own day, but He does not fit into the environment of our day. And we have not left Him behind. He is still ahead of us.

Most persons reflect the age in which they live. Jesus did not reflect His age at all. To study Jesus alone would give us not the slightest clue to the period in which He lived and labored, except as it might be partly described in His own addresses. We could not

understand His age by understanding Jesus, and His age did not understand Jesus because He lived so far in advance. In this respect His life is not altogether exceptional. While most men merely reflect the period in which they live, most generations have had a few men who lived far in advance of their times. But here is the significant truth: Given a reasonable number of years, the world has always caught up in time with the men who were spoken of as living "ahead of their times." For instance, Abraham lived ahead of his times; but we have passed Abraham. Moses lived ahead of his times; but we have passed Moses. Galileo lived ahead of his times; but we have passed Galileo. Lincoln lived ahead of his times; but we have passed Lincoln. It is inconceivable that ever again the civilized world will treat human beings as if they were but chattels. Civilization has outgrown slavery. In the writer's view, Woodrow Wilson was one of the clearest visioned seers who ever tried to lead the world into a higher and larger life, an idealist so far in advance of his age that most people still think of him as an impractical visionary. There has not been time as yet to grow into and realize the ideals which Wilson proclaimed,



but when mankind has done so it will not have begun to catch up with Jesus!

Do we seek to account for Jesus? Then consider this astonishing fact: We have not only not caught up with Him, but His ideals and His methods are still so far in advance of the most enlightened Christian opinion that only here and there may be found a man who does not in practice dismiss Jesus as an impossible visionary! For instance, we are just beginning to apply what Jesus taught—and practised—about brotherhood; yet most business men still think of the social and economic teachings of Jesus as so revolutionary that they must be kept in the realm of beautiful dreams, with no attempt to translate them into working conditions. We now discern dimly what Jesus meant when He said, "Put up thy sword;" but how many really believe that the way to conquer the world is by love instead of force, and that the only enduring kingdom is that kingdom of righteousness and peace and joy that is built in the hearts of men by the renewal of their spirits? Nearly 2,000 years after Jesus was on earth a few are sincerely seeking to get his point of view and apply his principles to the relations between races; yet we face the humiliating fact that in this nation



of which we boast as the greatest Christian democracy, where all men are equal, we find not merely the thoughtless rabble, but also many of those worthy to be called "best citizens" supporting organizations which exist to promote the ideal of native, white, Protestant supremacy! Surely we still have a long, long way to travel before we catch up with Jesus.

How are we to account for a Person who was not only so infinitely beyond His own times but whose conceptions of truth and right and spirit are still so far in advance of the race that most men react to Him as if He belonged to another race or a different world? Ponder that question. We actually do react to Jesus as if He belonged to a different race of beings. Yes, and something else is true: Deep down in our hearts we wish that we were like Him; we wish the world were the kind of neighborhood He portrayed; we wish His kingdom were come. Put these facts of observation together: We react to Jesus as if He belonged to another race and in our best moments we have a deep longing to be like Him. Our tongues are tied in the face of such a stupendous fact of human observation, but if we listen perhaps we can hear Him saying in the words of Alfred Noyes:

*"I am the End to which the whole world strives:  
Therefore are ye girdled with a wild desire and  
shod*

*With sorrow; for among you all no soul  
Shall ever cease, or sleep, or reach its goal  
Of union and communion with the Whole  
Or rest content with being less than God."*

Pause now and sum up what history and observation have to say. We find no period of human history into which Jesus fits or to which He seems to belong. Where, then, does He fit? Clearly He fits only into an order which is higher and finer than anything this old world ever yet has known, save in a single individual. Certainly the highest and finest conceptions of God, of truth, of living, ever yet manifested on the human plane are manifested by Jesus, and by Jesus only. What, then, must we conclude? To many of us, apart altogether from the affirmations of Scripture, there is but one conclusion. It is that Jesus was above the natural, above the human; that He was God manifest in the flesh. If so, then this must follow—and it is of supreme importance for us: That Person who lived and taught and sacrificed in Palestine to show His love to men and the power of His love over men still lives, and is still "the Way, and the Truth, and the Life."

## XVII

### THE ANSWER OF EXPERIENCE

**A**S some one still asking the question, "Who is this Son of Man?" Well, there is another way, and it is better than all the others. It is the way that Peter followed. Peter could not account for Jesus either. Peter could not understand Him. But one day Peter decided to make the venture of faith, and he said, "Master, we have left all to follow thee." Though not quite true in the abstract, that expressed Peter's ruling purpose. As a matter of fact, he had not left all. He clung tenaciously to some beliefs and prejudices. About all he left at the beginning was his fishing outfit. There would be many other things to leave before his end came—and much to learn. Nevertheless, Peter started on the venture of faith. He followed. And he kept on following, though sometimes "afar off." One day the Master presented a great spiritual message which so ran counter to the desires and mental habits of the crowd that they concluded He was "im-

possible" and melted away until there remained only the Twelve. Then one of the most pathetic questions ever voiced fell from the lips of Jesus. Turning to the Twelve He asked, "Will ye also go away?" It was Peter who answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go; thou hast the words of eternal life." Thus Peter kept following, sometimes doubting, sometimes fearing, until the time came when every question was answered and every doubt dissolved and the one time cowardly Peter could stand in the face of an unsympathetic multitude and tell them with courageous conviction that "this Jesus whom ye crucified" was "both Lord and Christ."

There is no way to become acquainted with Jesus which is so good as the way of experience, though it must be preceded by the venture of faith. And why not make the venture? What appeals to the best in all of us? It is the ideal, is it not? But something appeals much more than the ideal in the abstract. It is that same ideal embodied in a person. Well, the whole world finds that the finest, highest ideals of which mankind has dreamed are embodied in Jesus. And He stands today, just as He stood by Galilee, and cries to the soul-hungry, soul-thirsty multitudes who seek for

life and abundant life, "Follow me." Can anything be more reasonable than to make the venture? Millions have made it, and in making the venture of faith they have found something which never yet was sighted by human reason, or hammered out by human logic, or learned from the books of men. To surrender the life to the following of that Person who manifests the purest, loveliest ideals that ever appeared above the horizon is the best way to find an answer to one's questions and victory for one's life.

Years ago, the story runs, France and Spain contended for supremacy on the plains of Italy. Battle after battle had been won by the Spanish forces and the French officers were discouraged and ready to retreat. Just then there arrived a new commanding general, sent out from Paris. He had no great fame as a strategist or as an expert in military science, but to a rare degree he possessed the love and confidence of the common soldiers in the French army. He met with his officers. They advocated retreat. He argued, persuaded, pleaded. It made no difference. Finally, it is said, young Gaston de Foix turned away from those who were his counsellors, moved alone in the direction from which the enemy was ap-

proaching, then turned back toward the French army which stood awaiting orders, waved his sword and cried in a loud voice, "Let him that loves me, follow me!" As if moved by a common will the French army sprang forward to the attack and in an incredibly short time the Lions of Aragon and the Castles of Castile went down before the Lilies of France. What reason and argument could not do, had been accomplished when men responded to the call of love.

Across the centuries there comes the voice of One greater than young de Foix, but its appeal is the same: "Follow me." Respond to that appeal, for in such response is the way to victory and peace, and one cannot follow long before he comes to know that he must cry aloud, "'My Lord, and my God.'" It is in the sincere effort to follow in the footsteps of the Man of Galilee that one becomes more and more convinced that Jesus was more than man. Paradoxical as it may seem, the closer we come to Him the farther away He seems to be. The better we know Him the more keenly we sense our own inferiority. As we surrender to His leadership more and more completely, we become more and more certain that we are striving to attain unto a divine ideal. The

understanding of Jesus grows on those who follow Him.

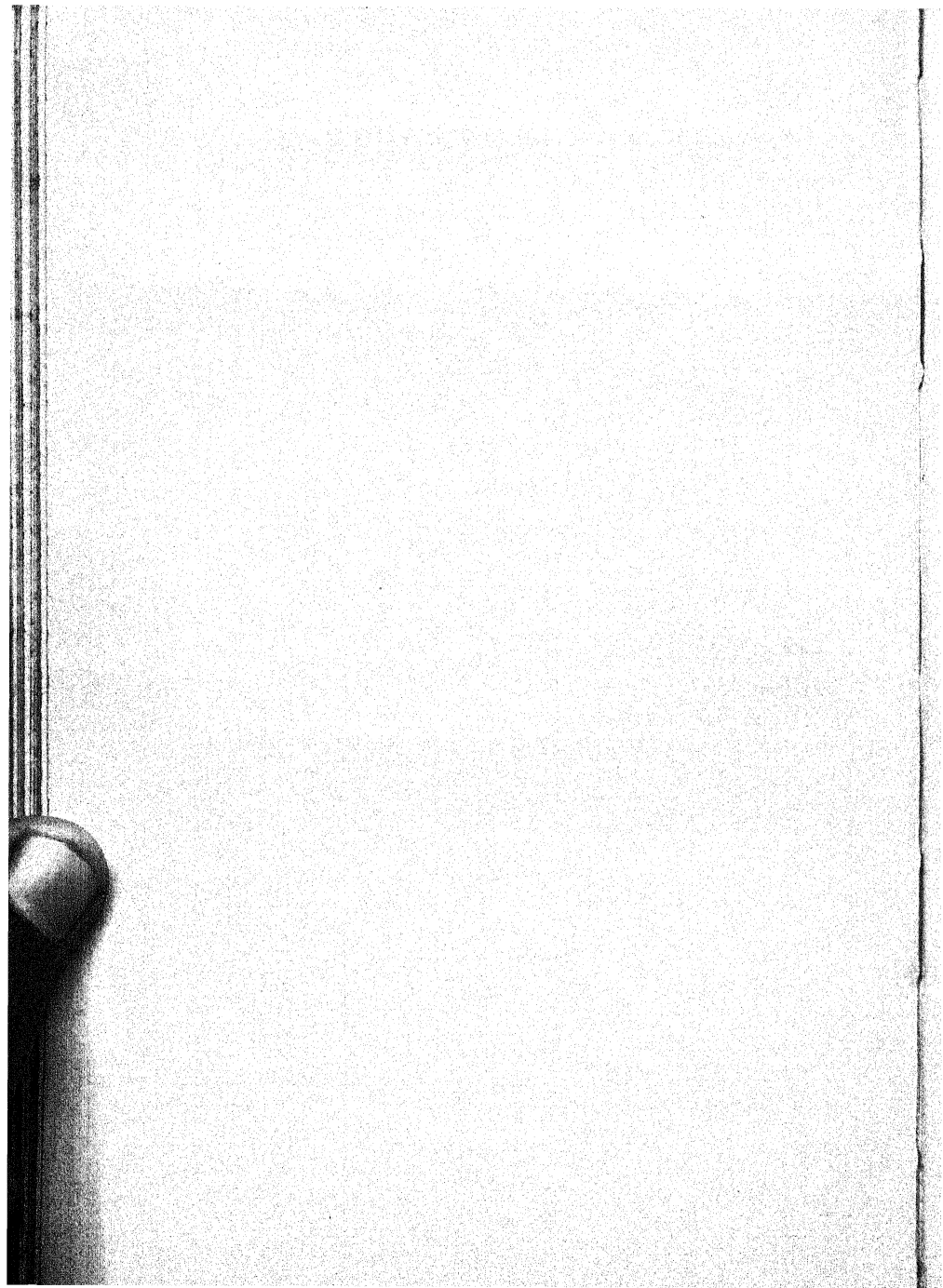
*"Jesus!" The angel's name for Mary's child  
At mother's knee to childish ears became  
The symbol of a teacher meek and mild,  
A hallowed man who bore a hallowed name.*

*"The Christ!" To eyes of upward-looking youth  
The Galilean came as more than man;  
As God's anointed, filled with grace and truth,  
By seers foretold; fulfilling heaven's plan.*

*"Redeemer!" Now the man who was Messiah  
Has closer come; As Saviour of my soul  
Has loosed my bonds, fulfilled my heart's desire,  
Brought peace and light and made the sin-  
sick whole.*

*"Jesus, the Christ, Redeemer!" Is that all?  
Nay. With increasing joy my song I sing;  
In full surrender at His feet I fall  
And cry with loud acclaim: "My Lord! My  
King!"*





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